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2006

Uncle Peter Sked

By JOHN BEATTY

COLUMBUS, OHIO
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UNCLE PETER SKED

I

A SLIP BETWEEN CUP AND LIP

THOSE who know nothing of Cranberry County save what they see of it as they are whirled across its undulated surface on the graded track of a railway, may naturally enough conclude it is a stale subdivision of the commonwealth, where population vegetates all unconscious of events which tend to quicken the blood of men. But notwithstanding the unpicturesqueness of its scenery, the plainness of its farm houses, and the unfashionable costume of its inhabitants, it will be found to have its fair quota of social ups and downs, and dramatic episodes; and should these ever fail to leaven the human lump sufficiently, the spring and fall elections may always be relied upon to give additional vivacity to the drowsy mass, and afford the usual crop of petty rivalries, political clap-trap, and needless lying.

Young men go a-courting in Cranberry, just as they do in more ostentatious sections of the country, and they sometimes get the girls they like best and sometimes do not; and occasionally in these little competitions for the favor of the fair sex, they maul each other with their fists, and so by a sort of counter irritation process, obtain relief from the intense soreness and aching of their hearts. And then again, purse proud and blood proud fathers, like such fathers elsewhere, grow irritable and obstinate and terribly dis-

agreeable when they discover young men of no property and perhaps little promise, prowling about their houses, seeking opportunities to make love to handsome daughters who may be still in their teens, and hence too young to assume the responsibilities of married life. And sometimes philanthropic brothers take these young lovers in hand with a view to disciplining them for their own good and the sister's benefit, and as a wholesome lesson also to the neighborhood; then of course there is much to talk of when good people gather about the church door before service of a Sunday morning in summer time, and after service, too, for that matter, before they reluctantly scatter to their several homes to attend to the cow-milking, and other chores common to farm life.

The most interesting incident of this sort which ever transpired in Cranberry, occurred ten years ago, or thereabouts, when young Rob Brett, Mrs. Dick Dundren's second cousin, undertook to run away with 'Squire Dougald Frazier's daughter, and marry her in spite of opposition. He had arranged to have the Reverend Dr. Mathews, of Cranberry town, tie the marital knot, and was in the act of entering the parsonage gate with the blushing and trembling Gertrude on his arm, when lo! and behold! her three brothers, Dougald, Malcolm and Archie, pounced down upon him in great fury. All recollect the fight who saw it, and not a few were lookers-on, for it lasted above an hour and took place near sundown on the lawn in front of the pastor's house, and in the shadow of the principal church of the village.

Rob Brett was then twenty-two, and a thoroughbred, who stood straight on his legs and carried his chest well out. It was not his habit to consult people

as to whether he had better do what he pleased or not, and yet he was a manly fellow who was never known to take the property of other folks without permission, except in this one instance when he seized 'Squire Frazier's daughter; and it may be safely assumed in this case that the girl was not as strenuous in her objection to being picked up and hurried off, as she might have been. It is true, indeed, she desired to be an obedient daughter, and that she respected her father, and was a modest, well bred girl, withal, who could never have brought herself to the work of planning an elopement, or of assenting to one devised by others, But then she was desperately fond of Rob, and when the handsome fellow stopped her on the highway as she was returning to her home from a neighborly call, and half forcibly placed her in the carriage, and told her he had the marriage license in his pocket, and that Dr. Mathews was waiting for them, and that a little courage now would give them the victory, she was perhaps too bewildered to see her duty clearly, and possibly too weak to stand out resolutely against the man she loved. Of course if she had been a strong-minded woman of mature years she would have screamed, and scratched like a panther, and insisted upon a strict observance of all the proprieties, and died in her tracks rather than go upon such an errand without the conventional wedding garment. But Gertrude was young and Rob gave her small opportunity for calm reflection and the adoption of heroic measures. While assuring her of the intensity of his love, and depicting in vivid colors the delights of the future, he plied the whip so vigorously to a span of fleet-footed bays that almost before the astonished and trembling girl had time to collect her thoughts and

summon up whatever resolution she might have had within her, the carriage came to a sudden stop in front of the parsonage gate.

Old Dougald Frazier was a Scotchman, proud always and at times irritable, but when things went to suit him, genial and neighborly enough. He set great store by Gertrude, possibly because she was his youngest child, and only daughter; and possibly because his three sons were ne'er-do-weels, who afforded him neither aid nor comfort; and possibly because she was the loveliest girl of seventeen, or any other age, in all that country.

The 'Squire would doubtless have been a more contented citizen of the land of his adoption than he was, if he could have kept his thoughts from dwelling so intently and continuously on the castles of his ancestors, and the splendors of the time when the Fraziers stood side by side with kings on famous battlefields. But he could not, nor could he help contrasting his own humble farm house and the thousand or more acres of poorly cultivated land about it, with the stately mansion in which he was born, and the broad well-kept fields and picturesque scenery familiar to him in boyhood. Reflections like these were not at all calculated to increase his respect for the people of Cranberry County, and so when Rob Brett came skylarking about the Frazier homestead, the old aristocrat not only bade him keep away, but became violent and damned the whole generation of Bretts, their relatives and friends.

In this instance, however, as in many others, the 'Squire's lively temper leaped beyond the trim domain of justice and lighted amid the brambles of untruth; for there were many respectable folks in the

Brett family, and one of these was Mrs. Dick Dundren, the wife of a nephew of Gertrude's own mother. The fact is, there was only one person, so far as the public knew of the Brett connection, who was too mean to live, and that was old Peter Sked, the miser, Rob Brett's uncle. It must be admitted that he was altogether objectionable, but it was certainly no more Rob's duty to kill him than that of 'Squire Dougald himself. And it could not be denied that even the Skeds were an old family running back in a line easily traceable through the Revolution to a broad farm in Shropshire. There were now collateral members of it in the army, on the bench, and in the pulpit. As a rule whatever the Skeds took hold of they clung to tenaciously until they achieved success. Old Peter's predominating characteristic was simply an exaggeration of a peculiarity of the race. If he had begun life with a million it is not at all improbable that he would have been noted for his extravagance, and died without a dollar. The tendency of the Sked blood was toward extremes. Old Peter's grandfather had accumulated a fortune by a long life of sordid pinchings and abject discomforts, which the son, Peter's father, had scattered by open handed and reckless improvidence. The fact, therefore, that Peter, Rob's uncle, was a disgusting and relentless old skin flint should not have been accepted as proof conclusive that there was no generous blood in the Sked family. But let all this be as it may, old Dougald Frazier could not tolerate Rob Brett, and the sons regarded him with even greater disfavor than the father, and so had kept watch on him and ward on their sister for more than twelve months, prophesying, meanwhile, with much frequency and great emphasis that some ter-

rible disaster would ultimately overtake Rob if he did not seek bodily exercise at a respectful distance from the Frazier homestead. It may be these vaporings of a trio of idle roysterers spurred him to more vigorous measures than he at first contemplated; but this is by no means certain.

Old Dougald's sons did not occupy an elevated place in the estimation of their more temperate and frugal neighbors, and their utterances were not accepted as current coin and passed from hand to hand unquestioned. No man can continue a habitual and intemperate imbiber of raw whisky for ten years without going at the end of that time, if indeed he has not gone before, to the poor house, the prison, or the grave; and Dougald, Malcolm and Archie Frazier were in a fair way to reach all the places named, and quite sure, at least, of one of them. The mother, Mr. Dick Dundren's aunt, had very fortunately for herself, died while her sons were still bright, promising young boys, and hence had experienced none of the heart-rending anxieties with which fond mothers watch from day to day the gradual descent and final degradation of their own flesh and blood. No father, perhaps, was ever fonder of his sons, at first, and more desirous of their success, than the elder Frazier; but after the mother's death, they, by frequent and prolonged absences from home and riotous conduct, gradually destroyed his confidence in them, until finally he seemed to abandon all hope of their reformation, and to rely on Gertrude alone to maintain and perpetuate, in so far as one of her sex could do it, the traditions and honors of the family.

But the girl loved the castles which her fancy builded better than the turreted strongholds of her

ancestors, and she thought more of Robert Brett, a thousand times, than of the dead Fraziers who fought with Robert Bruce, and yet when her lover sought to hand her from the carriage at Dr. Mathews' gate, she grew deathly pale and shrank from him, and her quivering lips seemed to be making an unsuccessful effort to frame a protest. But it was now no time for argument, and so Rob put his strong arms around her, and with gentle force lifted her to the ground, and then supported her up the narrow walk leading to the door of the parsonage.

Fifteen uninterrupted minutes would doubtless have translated Gertrude into Mrs. Brett for life, or at least until Rob shuffled off the mortal coil, and left her free to take another name. But just then, unfortunately, her brothers came dashing up on horseback, and dismounting hastily, profaned the sacred edifice in the shadow of which they stood, and shocked the minister of peace in whose hearing they were, by pouring upon Brett's head torrents of blasphemous and vile invective. Gertrude would have fallen now if Rob had not taken her up in his arms and carried her to Dr. Mathews, who, upon the arrival of the carriage, had come to the door of the parsonage with his wife, to welcome the couple whose marriage he expected to solemnize.

When the door had closed behind Gertrude and Mrs. Mathews, Rob turning to the brothers, said quietly:

"Now, gentlemen, you have talked enough. What do you propose to do?"

"We propose to prevent this marriage," said Dougald. "It's downright robbery——"

"It's the trick of a beggarly scoundrel to get a farm," shouted Malcolm.

"It's the attempt of a d—— rascal to thrust himself where he is not wanted," yelled Archie.

"Gentlemen," interposed the pastor, "discuss this matter less violently — surely Mr. Brett stands well in this community, and is entitled to fair — gentlemanly — treatment."

"Do you call it the act of a gentleman to seek to take advantage of a young girl?" retorted Dougald.

"To hang about another's house like a sneak thief?" said Malcolm.

"To push himself into a family which despises him?" said Archie.

"If Miss Gertrude is satisfied," replied Dr. Mathews, "surely you should be; she has a greater interest in the matter than yourselves; why not leave her the same freedom to choose you would insist upon if in her place?"

"She shall not disgrace the Fraziers," replied Dougald hotly. "Her father and brothers have rights which she shall not be permitted to disregard."

"Rights or no rights, she shall not marry Brett," said Archie.

"That will depend wholly upon her will and wishes, "interposed Rob, calmly. "If she consents there are not Fraziers enough in Cranberry County to prevent."

"There is one right here," retorted Archie, squaring himself for action, "who can prevent it and will."

"And another here," cried Malcolm.

"And still another," shouted Dougald.

Rob made no reply in words, but sprang upon his opponents with the fierceness of a tiger. The

struggle shall not be described. It is enough to say that when it ended and some enthusiastic fellow in the crowd of lookers-on proposed three cheers for Rob Brett, they were given so vigorously no one could for a moment doubt the sympathy of the village people had been with him throughout, and that they were entirely satisfied with the result. The blood of the Fraiers, coming as it did from a long line of warriors stretching back to the somewhat hazy time of Bruce and Wallace, may have been superior to the crimson current of other folks, but on this occasion it certainly failed to exalt itself by any special feat of generosity or valor. It is one thing, however, to be clad in linked steel and contend with shepherds clad in sheep skin, and another to stand up on fair terms and strike out from the shoulder with bare knuckles. In this latter game Rob Brett, although he seldom played it, had no equal in Cranberry County.

There was pressing need just now for the village surgeon, and for plasters and poultices. Dougald was stunned beyond consciousness; Malcolm and Archie were not only much disfigured about the face and dim of vision, but exceedingly tender in the region of the ribs. Rob had not, by any means, escaped unhurt; indeed his face and head and chest had been sorely pummeled, but thanks to a sturdy pair of legs he could still stand erect. Going to Dr. Mathews, who stood at the door of the parsonage, shocked by the struggle he had been unable to prevent, and was compelled to witness, Brett said:

"Can I see Gertrude? I think the ceremony may be performed now."

"Mr. Brett," returned the pastor solemnly, "I fear a funeral is more likely to follow this unfortunate and

most disgraceful affair than a wedding.— You have made a grave mistake, sir."

"But I must see Gertrude! I shall abide by her decision in the matter."

"She will not see you——"

"I do not believe you, sir — I beg pardon — I do not mean to question the truth of your statement nor to speak roughly — but I must see Gertrude. If I have done her wrong I should ask her forgiveness. God knows I meant well — I — I — may have erred in thinking she loved me as deeply — as sincerely — as I do her, but surely this is no great offense."

"When I say she will not," replied the pastor softly, and with better feeling in his tone, "I simply repeat her own words."

This was the first blow that staggered Rob; his courage seemed for an instant to disappear, but after a time he said:

"Dr. Mathews, I think you misunderstood her. If I may not see her, bring me the words you have uttered over her own signature, and — and — I shall leave and trouble her no more."

"Mr. Brett," said the pastor kindly, for he saw it was love and not mere bravado that had prompted the young man to adopt the course he had taken, "you are not managing this matter wisely. You should not urge Miss Frazier to a decision now; time and patience are likely to prove good friends to you."

"No, no, I must see her or have proof that she will not see me. After coming so far I shall neither stop nor be stopped by anybody but Gertrude."

"I am an older man than you are — old enough indeed to be your father — and have had much experience; take my advice and let the matter rest until

the bitterness and sorrow occasioned by this struggle are in some degree forgotten."

"I will not — I mean to say I cannot."

It was evidently a waste of time to prolong the discussion. There was nothing the good pastor could do now, but re-enter his house and consult Gertrude.

She had at no time consented to an irregular and hasty marriage. The impetuosity of young Brett reinforced by her own sincere affection, had simply paralyzed her discretion and overpowered her will. But the rude interruption at the parsonage had broken the spell that was upon her and given her time to reflect. All her innate sense of delicacy and maidenly decorum now came to her assistance. If Brett's proceedings were ill-advised even before the struggle, as she now perceived they were, still less could she consent to the immediate exchange of marriage vows after what had passed. Having just experienced the force of her lover's importunity she determined not to subject herself to it again, and to defer all thought of matrimony to a happier season. Consequently she deemed it best that Brett should not again that day be admitted to her presence.

After a brief absence Dr. Mathews returned with a little scrap of paper which he handed to the importunate young man. Rob stared at the writing on it for a moment, and looking up into Dr. Mathews' face, said:

"You were right; I have made a great mistake. Good-bye."

Rob now walked slowly to the street, and then proceeded to the village hotel. A few hours later he left Cranberry on a westward going train, and has

not been seen or heard of, by his old neighbors, from that time to this.

Ten years — the one-sixth part of an old man's life — have gone by since then. 'Squire Frazier and his son Malcolm are sleeping in the little cemetery on Sand Ridge. Dougald and Archie have sold the land inherited from their father, and squandered the money it brought them. The former is a broken man depending in some degree upon his sister's bounty for a comfortable home. The fractured bones resulting from his struggle with Brett have indirectly served to prolong his life by compelling him to curb his passion for strong drink. Archie, if living, is a wanderer; his old acquaintances of Cranberry have lost all trace of him. Gertrude has for eight years been a welcome guest at Cherry Farm in the family of her cousin, Richard Dundren. If common rumor may be relied upon she is the handsome, estimable and wealthy lady whom the distinguished Mr. Travis proposes to endow, in due time, with his name, fortune and prospective triumphs in law and politics. The people in that locality, however, differ somewhat as to which of the persons named is to be the gainer by the contemplated marriage. Some claiming that with all his money and splendid prospects the honorable Mr. Travis is unworthy of such a woman. Others insist that he is far too good for one who could turn her back on Rob Brett when he was driven to desperation by love of her. But it should be known that this adverse criticism of Gertrude comes wholly from the few personal friends of Rob who still persist in remembering him as the bravest and manliest, but possibly the most imprudent and reckless fellow who ever set foot in Cranberry County.

II

SKED

ACCORDING to a rule of alternation thus far always adhered to by the Democratic party in that political subdivision of the state, Cranberry County was entitled to the candidate for Congress, and public sentiment had quietly settled upon Richard Dundren as a man well qualified to represent the district and entirely worthy of the honor of a nomination. In business affairs he had for years been recognized as a leader, while in all social and charitable matters his good wife was deservedly prominent. Cherry Farm, the home of the Dundrens, was a pleasant place of a thousand acres, with a spring brook rippling in gentle curves across it, and a roomy farm house standing modestly back from the public highway, noted in all that region for hospitality. It was but natural that the thoughts of the honest Democrats of an agricultural district should center upon this thrifty and popular farmer when seeking a suitable person to carry the party banner in the approaching conflict.

It would not be correct, however, to conclude from the unanimity with which Mr. Dundren's nomination was foreshadowed, that there were no other aspirants for Congressional honors in Cranberry County. Mr. Travis' ambition in this direction was well known, and had been freely discussed by his political friends. But Mr. Travis was a lawyer who, for sundry reasons, was not popular with the people. In the first place he was exceedingly fond of money and never

permitted considerations of either delicacy or honor to interrupt his pursuit of it. It was also whispered confidentially by those who knew him best, that in the practice of his profession he had not only taken fees from both sides, but had finally deceived both, and by ingenious lying, and the assistance of cheap confederates swindled the creditor who employed him out of nearly the full value of a just claim, and then enforced its collection against the debtor to whom he had secretly made overtures of the utmost friendliness. He did not, however, confine himself exclusively to the law; on the contrary, he was a politician of the most aggressive character, and by some persons believed to be even less scrupulous in this line than in the practice of his profession. Indeed his enemies were not slow to affirm that he was eminent not only for cunning in the contrivance of schemes of political rascality, but for boldness in their execution, and that no corrupt job was ever concocted in the county in which he did not have a hand and share. It should be borne in mind, however, that these were the statements of men whose defeat at the polls had at one time or another, perhaps, been popularly attributed to Mr. Travis' superior tact and energy.

But notwithstanding all that may have been said against his political and professional methods, it must be admitted that he was a gentleman of good form and bearing, whose speech, apparently, was the essence of sincerity and truthfulness. He was shrewd enough at this time to know that in a contest with Dundren he could look forward to nothing save a needless expenditure of money and a humiliating defeat; but if his chances of success had been ten-fold greater than they were, he would have hesitated to make any open

opposition to his more popular rival, for the simple reason that he was a suitor for the hand of Gertrude Frazier, and any interference with the political aspirations of her cousin might materially abridge his opportunities to win an estimable wife and handsome fortune. He felt, therefore, that the wisest thing for him to do under the circumstances, was to unite with the majority of his party in support of the owner of Cherry Farm.

This in brief was the political situation in Cranberry when a man who had no more respect for politicians than for the dust he trod on, and no more influence in nominating conventions than the town pump, appeared on the scene and not only knocked the predictions of the most sagacious all awry, but thwarted the popular will, and compelled it to accept the candidate whom it least desired.

The twenty-two years elapsed since Peter Sked began his annual visits to Cherry Farm have wrought some changes in him. The hair which at fifty was just turning gray has at seventy-two become quite white. The bend of the figure, then partly affected, has now increased to a real and permanent deformity. The habit of holding audible communion with himself as if he were talking to an invisible companion, has so grown upon him that in these discussions he frequently becomes violent and profane.

His journeys by daylight are now usually limited to sections of the country where, if the people know him at all, they only know him as a persistent and disgusting beggar. He is accustomed to darkness, and often travels by night. He rarely sleeps in a house and never does so when it would cost him money, or any-

thing which by possibility could be exchanged for it. His clothing is ragged and unclean, tied together in places by such bits of twine as he has been able to pick up in his wanderings. He wears no stockings, and his bony and dirty ankles are visible between the flapping upper leather of his shoes and the ragged bottoms of his too scanty trousers. At sunset he turns into Dundren's gate, and shuffling up to the front door gives the knocker such a sounding as might serve to startle a whole neighborhood. He is admitted by one of the children of the house, and going through the hall is met by Mrs. Dundren, and invited to seat himself in an arm chair which she places near her own.

"I hope you are well, Cousin Peter," said she as Peter dropped into his seat.

"Never better, Helen — never better. Is Dick at home, eh?"

"Yes, Richard is at home, Cousin Peter."

"Is he making money, Helen? Can he pay his debts?"

"I hope so," she answered with a troubled look; "but I sometimes fear Richard has undertaken too much, and borrowed too largely. You know how hard it is for farmers to make from uncertain crops enough to provide for the certain interest which grows nights and Sundays. All seasons are alike good for it, but many seasons leave the farmers' bins empty at the end of harvest time."

"Tut, tut, Helen, what makes you talk so of interest? It's a mere nothing — nothing. A man may put fifty dollars in a colt and sell it for seventy-five or a hundred the next month, or the next year. What rate per cent. is that, eh? You buy a sheep in the fall for two dollars, take a dollar's worth of wool off

it in the spring, and then sell the sheep and its lamb for three, eh? What rate per cent. is that, madam? And yet you talk as if a poor man who got ten dollars for the use of one hundred during a whole year — a whole year, mind — was a robber. Tut, tut, woman; you know little of business. The farmer buys a mare, say, she has a colt, he sells the mare at a profit, and has the colt extra. What rate per cent. is that? Eh? Come, come, no nonsense, Helen."

The subject was not an agreeable one to Mrs. Dundren, and with a view of diverting Peter's thoughts from it she said:

"You must be very tired, Cousin Peter; you are such a rapid walker, and you always walk."

"What are legs for," responded Peter sharply; "what are legs for? Eh? To straddle and wear out a horse that will sell for a hundred dollars, good money? To be wheeled about in a carriage that may be cost three hundred? Nonsense! legs were made to walk with. They're cheaper than horseflesh and safer, mind that, madam, cheaper and safer. The money some men spend in useless riding would make them rich in thirty years; mind that, eh? Rich!"

"But, Cousin Peter, there's much to live for besides money. It is pleasant to have nice things about you — to have books and horses and carriages, and good houses, and neat and comfortable clothing, and——"

"The less the better, madam. They wear out and are gone forever. It's sheer waste; our investments should be in things which increase, not in those which diminish. The value of all things should be estimated by the income in ready money to be derived from them.

On a large farm like this, may be, you spend a dollar a day which might be saved. How much at simple interest payable annually would this saving amount to in fifty years? How much? One hundred thousand dollars! No trifling sum, Helen; a good thing to have, madam."

Mrs. Dundren made no reply to Peter's disquisition on the power of interest and the importance of economy in daily expenditures, and after a moment's silence he asked:

"Is Dick still making a fool of himself in politics? Eh?"

"He is a candidate for Congress and quite certain to be nominated by his party," replied Mrs. Dundren, softly.

"If he is nominated and elected will it bring him money to pay his debts?" asked the old man sharply. "Will the office fetch him money to pay his debts, Helen? That's the point, eh?"

"I have no doubt it will, Cousin Peter," replied Mrs. Dundren. "The salary I understand is large. O, yes, it will be a great help to him."

"I don't know, madam; I think there is some doubt about it. Offices are not always obtained by those who want them, and they generally cost more than they are worth any how."

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of a tall, strongly built man of perhaps forty-five. His high top boots suggested that he had been on horseback, and his ruddy face that he was accustomed to open air and fond of bodily exercise. He was in the prime of manhood and evidently disposed to get all the comfort out of life attainable. The mo-

ment he caught sight of his wife's cousin he called out in a brusque, good natured tone:

"Hello, Peter, you old flint, are you around again?"

"Yes," responded Peter.

"Nothing so certain to come back as a bad penny. Confound it, man! why don't you buy, beg or steal a decent and comfortable suit of clothes?"

"I'm too honest to steal," replied Peter; "begging is a slow business, and as for buying, I shall do that when there's no better manner to invest what little money falls in my way."

The supper bell now rang, and Peter was invited to the dining room. After partaking of a hearty meal they returned to the sitting room, when Peter opened the conversation rather abruptly by declaring that he had present need of ready money and must insist upon gathering in what people owed him.

"Cousin Peter," said Mrs. Dundren as she placed the easy chair before him, "you must not be too hard on Richard."

"But Richard must pay his debts in money," replied the old man, crustily; "promises won't answer."

"The farm is good for it, Peter," responded Dundren, soberly. "You don't need the money. Why, confound it, man, you can't find any body who'll pay you a bigger interest than I do."

"Pay, eh? Did you say pay?" Peter's small eyes fairly blazed. "When did you pay interest? Pay! Why, I've not seen a copper of your money, not a copper. How long is it since I made you the loan? How long, eh?"

"Twenty years or more," replied Dundren, meditatively.

"Twenty-one years last corn cutting," said Sked with emphasis. "Nearly twenty-two years and not a cent of either principal or interest has come back to me."

"But," began Dundren in an apologetic tone as he walked to and fro across the room, "you never pressed me for payment before, Peter; you always seemed to prefer my note for the amount of the annual interest. I gave you what you appeared to desire most. I could have paid you the interest at first easily enough, for at first it was small and a little retrenchment here and there in house and farm would have kept things even, but you never seemed to want it then."

"And so you blame me for my leniency, eh? For my kindness of heart and forbearance?" cried Sked in a rasping voice, "and so you would——"

"No, no, Peter," broke in Dundren with a hearty laugh, as he stopped and looked the old man in the face; "I never blamed you for anything of that sort. I knew you had no more heart than a grindstone, Peter, and confound you, man! I don't intend to be bullied by you now. You have my notes of hand; the debt is an honest one, at least as honest as any debt is where usury is piled on usury, and then usuriously compounded——"

"What! what! you plead usury? Eh?" If there was ever murder in Sked's flashing eyes it was there at this moment. "You plead the baby act, eh?"

"Hold, you old flint!" said Dundren sternly; "I plead nothing except a willingness to sell the clothes off my back to pay your claim in full. I am proud to say my fathers for two hundred years have paid their

debts. I shall pay mine. Your money has come to me so easily — at first indeed without solicitation, and at last by renewals of the original sum and interest — that I have been led to do many things I should not have done — that a prudent man would not have done who expected to be called on suddenly to pay the debt. This house has been built when a cheaper one would have sheltered us as well; I have made investments in lands and blooded cattle which a discreet man would not ordinarily have done with borrowed money; I have entered upon a system of underdraining, the cost of which I can not hope to get back at once, and I confess to many expenditures and small extravagancies into which I have been drawn gradually, and almost unconsciously, by having in possession more ready money and more property than really belonged to me, for men who seem rich must act as rich men should if they would avoid the reputation of being mean and niggardly — I have endeavored to avoid this; I could not bear to have my neighbors think so ill of me——"

"I see, I see," broke in Sked impatiently, "I have been to blame for all your troubles. This is the substance of your argument, eh? I should not have made the loan to you at all, but after committing the first offense, I should have pressed you for the annual interest instead of allowing it to accumulate from year to year. I see, I see, I made a mistake when I sought to do a kindness. It shall not be repeated."

Rising from his chair and pointing his long bony finger at Dundren, he cried, angrily: "It shall not be repeated; pay me — pay me what you owe me, sir. I want money and must have it."

"Cousin Peter," interposed Mrs. Dundren sooth-

ingly, "Richard did not mean to offend you; he simply sought to make an apology for his own shortcomings — not his alone, but mine also, all he asks now is a little time——"

"No, no," Sked answered hotly. "If I were to grant more time it would be heaping injury on injury. Come now, I see how it is, eh? My money has made your husband the great farmer — the great man of the county. It has even suggested to him that he should play the role of statesman, and now I am a robber because I ask that my own shall be returned to me; because its restitution will take your husband down a peg in the estimation of the people. I have heard such talk before, madam. It has always satisfied me the time had come when I should have my own." Turning from wife to husband, he continued: "Pay your debt and I shall give you no further cause to censure me."

The idea of making immediate payment was so absurdly impossible that, sober as he had been hitherto, Dundren could not refrain from laughter, and when he laughed, like the strong man he was, he did so heartily.

The old man's anger instantly forsook him; his heart was clutched with the terrible suspicion that by some dishonest transfer of property Dundren had rendered himself execution proof, and was therefore in condition to laugh at his creditors.

"Is my demand for payment so very amusing to you?" he said quietly as he sat down. "Does it strike you as a matter to be laughed at? Eh?"

"It does," replied Dundren, placing a chair near Sked, and seating himself in it. "How much do I owe you, Peter?"

"You should know — your books should tell," said Peter with returning courage.

"And so will the bills. I have not thought it worth while to keep the account. I knew you would do it."

"The question is easily answered," said the old man, fishing from his underclothing a soiled handkerchief tied into many knots, from one of which he took a greasy wallet and from this a little package of dirty papers. "Here the notes are. Principal and interest amount to a little over eighty thousand, sir. Would you like to verify the calculations? Eh?"

"No, I'll take your word for it?" said Dundren, soberly. "The sum twenty-one years ago last October was ten thousand. Interest at ten per cent. compounded annually and working night and day, amounts to something, Peter."

"I could have loaned the money at twelve per cent.," said Peter, eagerly. "I could have loaned it to a hundred men as good as you at twelve — to better men, in fact."

"To wiser men, perhaps — to men who would have made better use of the money, to men more able to pay it back," replied Dundren, sadly, "but to none more anxious to do so, Peter."

Sked's heart sank, and his knees began to shake again, as he asked:

"What do you mean, sir? Do you mean to say you can't pay me?"

"I mean to say I can't do it now, Peter. It would be impossible to do it suddenly without stripping me of all I have, and turning my family out of doors."

"Would you be left in any worse condition than

others — than many others? Are not the lands, horses and cattle really mine, not yours?"

"They were not when I made the original loan," replied Dundren, thoughtfully; "I had something then; I certainly had five hundred acres of good land and was out of debt. Now I have a thousand acres and owe this great sum. The interest has won them all to you — surely all if you press me now."

"Well, well, no man can blame me for asking my own. You have already reminded me that I have indulged you too long. The interest is accumulating at the rate of eight thousand a year. If the burden is heavy now, it will be heavier still a year hence. You must pay. Give me what belongs to me and accept yourself what belongs to you. Right's right, and right wrongs no man, eh?"

"Will you buy the farm, Peter? Come, now, make me a fair offer for it."

"I'm not a farmer; I'm too old for farming," said Sked thoughtfully. "If I were to buy, it would be to sell again, and it might be years before I could find a purchaser. In the meantime the farm would not pay the interest on my money. No, no, I do not want land and live stock. The seasons are too uncertain to make the one profitable, and the other eat their heads off before you know it. I shall not buy."

"Give me a few months' time and I'll find sale for it, or at least for enough of it to pay your claim."

"A few months — a few months," returned the old man, angrily, "no, no; men have sold farms and put the money in their pockets — or their wives' pockets, beyond reach of the sheriff, in a few months. Give me a mortgage to secure my claim, and I'll wait a few months, but not otherwise — a mortgage on land,

farming implements and live stock. I have been too indulgent in this matter, too careless and confiding. Your two months is but a trick to swindle me."

Dundren heard him through, but almost before the last words were fairly uttered he turned fiercely on the old man, and seizing him by the coat, gave a sudden jerk which would have brought him to his feet if the rotten garment had not given way. Mrs. Dundren put herself between them, and begged her husband to be quiet.

"No, no," cried Sked in an aggrieved tone, "let him murder an old man if he will. May be he thinks it an easy way to pay an honest debt. Let him do it if he wants to."

"Murder you!" exclaimed Dundren, indignantly; "no, no, I will not do that, but I shall allow no man to sit in my own house——"

"You mean my house, eh?" interjected Sked snappishly.

"——in anybody's house," continued Dundren, "and insinuate that I am a thief who seeks an opportunity to defraud his creditors. I shall not stand it from any one, old or young."

"Richard, say no more," pleaded Mrs. Dundren, "I beg you to say no more, and let me show Cousin Peter to his room."

"No," said Dundren firmly, "he shall neither eat nor sleep in this house until I cease to occupy it. I shall not be bullied and insulted by him again. If he does not leave at once of his own accord, I shall kick him out."

"Let him kick," said Sked in a half injured, half defiant tone; "I have been kicked before — Robert

Brett could have told you how much it costs to kick me, eh?"

"Yes, you vindictive wretch, you stony-hearted fiend," cried Dundren thrusting his wife aside and grasping Sked's arm. "He knew and I know how you pursued him day and night with unrelenting cruelty, until you had impoverished him, broken the heart of his wife, your sister, and made their child — your nephew — a penniless wanderer. We all know the terrible story, and if there is one place in hell hotter than another, it is the place you deserve to occupy for your conduct in that very case. Now gather up your baggage and get out, or I shall do precisely what Robert Brett did twenty years ago, and was justified in doing. To-night I am master here. Come, stir yourself more nimbly. If there was a shilling in sight you would go toward it fast enough."

"And I'll go toward the money you——"

"Yes, and you'll get it — every penny of it. My children shall never be compelled to admit that their father did not pay his debts. Go!"

"He has torn my coat," whined Sked, as Mrs. Dundren handed him his hat and umbrella. "It's a pretty condition he has left me in to face the dews of night in a malarious season. This is hospitality, eh?"

"Here, take this," cried Dundren, stripping off his own coat and throwing it after the retreating man.

Sked picked up the garment from the floor, and although it was too large for him, went off with it. He cared not the snap of one's finger whether it fitted him or not, but was pleased to know it cost him nothing, and was worth something. When the front door closed against him, and he was shuffling down the walk to the public road two lively dogs caught sight

of him and, concluding he was an enemy, started in pursuit with such impetuosity and noise that Peter, striking about him vigorously with his umbrella, exclaimed:

"Confound the dogs, and dod-blast their keepers. I don't wonder they can't make ends meet at this house. I believe they keep a thousand worthless curs."

III

MR. TRAVIS

WHEN Peter emerged from the trees and shrubs which darkened the lawn of the Dundren homestead, he found the sky clear and the light sufficient to enable him to pick his way without difficulty along the public road. It might be supposed by one who had heard his discussion with Dundren, and knew the manner of his exit from that gentleman's comfortable house, that just now he would not be in a very amiable mood; but not so. As he trudged on in the darkness, his mind was active, and his busy tongue gave ready utterance to his thoughts. He was, indeed, congratulating himself on the fortunate termination of the interview. He did not want his money, but he had sense enough to know the farm, fertile and valuable as it was, would not much longer afford security for his claim. Up to this time it had been abundantly good for all the money loaned, and the accumulations of interest. If sold now in a hard market, it could be made to pay the debt, but if disposed of a year or two hence, even in a more favorable time, it would probably not fetch enough more than at present to pay the additional interest. What he most desired, therefore, was an open rupture with his debtor to prepare the way somewhat for the immediate collection of the claim. It is not easy for even the hardest creditor to turn a debtor out of doors, who has as a rule treated him with courtesy. Still Sked would not ordinarily

have hesitated to do this; in fact, he had done it many times, but in this instance the debtor's wife was his own cousin, who had always welcomed him to her house and given him good dinners, soft beds, and respectful entertainment. Under the circumstances, therefore, it was particularly gratifying to have her husband lay violent hands on him, and threaten to forcibly eject him from the premises.

It was but an hour's walk from Cherry Farm to the county seat. When Sked reached the village its shops were still open and many people on the street. Going directly to the second floor of a business block, he walked along the dimly lighted hall until he came to the room he sought. Opening the door he entered. It was an attorney's office.

" 'Squire Travis," said Peter to the man he found writing at a table, "you know me, don't you?"

"Certainly; but what brings you here at this hour? I have no time to waste, and no alms to give."

"Business," said Sked emphatically, "important to you and to me."

"Well, well, it will keep until morning. I am engaged to-night in the preparation of an important case. Call at nine to-morrow, and I will hear what you have to say."

"No, you must hear me to-night if you hear me at all," said Sked firmly. "Five minutes will do; if you can't spare the time, I shall look for some one else."

The lawyer was annoyed by the interruption, but he laid down his pen, and pointing to a chair, said:

"There, sit down; now make it short."

"I have a claim against a farmer of this county, and desire suit begun for its collection."

"Of what amount?"

"Over eighty thousand dollars," replied Peter.

"Against whom?"

"One of the wealthiest men of the county, or rather one who is supposed to be," said Peter. "A claim against a responsible man, sir."

"Have you the evidence of it with you?"

"I have the man's notes of hand; he will not resist payment. There will be no contest. The proceedings will be simply matters of form, requiring no more legal knowledge and no more labor than if the sum to be collected were a hundred dollars. I want to know first what you will charge for making the collection. It is always best to have an understanding when we begin so there may be no misunderstanding when we end, eh? Now, how much for preparing the petition, and, when the time comes, asking judgment in the case? How much?"

"The claim, you say, is for eighty thousand," said Mr. Travis, eyeing the old man sharply.

"More, more," said Sked. "If figured up to-day it would amount to eighty-two or eighty-three thousand."

"The ordinary fee would be five per cent., but on so large a sum I would make it three provided the case is not litigated."

"What!" shouted Sked, "twenty-five hundred dollars for an hour's work? Why, man, you're either crazy or you think I am."

"No," replied Travis coolly, " I am entirely sane, and I hope you are, but you must bear in mind the years spent in the labor of qualifying myself for doing this hour's work. You must remember, also, the grave responsibility I assume in seeing it done properly. You should understand, also, that the debtor may be

a friend, and by accepting a case against him I may lose his patronage. You should be aware, also, that the work of pressing debtors is not regarded favorably by the people, and may lose me many clients——"

"Dod-blast it, man," cried Sked impatiently while reaching for his umbrella, "I know all this and all you could tell me if you talked till midnight. I tell you flatly I shall pay no such fee. It's robbery, downright robbery — that's what it is."

"Well, well, you can, of course, do as you please. What do you say to sixteen hundred? That would be but two per cent. on eighty thousand. I don't say I'd do it, but I'd think about it; what do you say?"

The old man had risen and was moving to the door.

"I should say I wouldn't give it, nor the half of it, nor the quarter of it. A man better let his money go uncollected than be robbed of it in that way."

Mr. Travis now quit his chair, intending to get rid of his visitor as soon as possible, and began inwardly to condemn himself for permitting the disagreeable old man to remain so long; but just then it occurred to him that he would like to know who owed so large a sum. The information might be made profitable in sundry ways. He could tell the debtor he had refused the case, and thus perhaps obtain a larger fee than Sked would pay, by advising him to contest the claim, and so postpone the payment of it, a scheme dishonest debtors often resort to in order to gain time in which to sell their property and pocket the proceeds, or turn them over to their wives. With these thoughts uppermost in his mind, Travis said softly:

"Of course, Mr. Sked, if I knew who the debtor was we might perhaps agree on terms. In asking me

to accept a case you should in all fairness tell me the facts relating to it before you go so far as to accuse me of an attempt to rob you. There are some men I should not like to take a case against for any fee, however large it might be. In fact, there are men to whom I am under obligations, and against whom as an honest man I could not appear. Tell me the name of the debtor and if we agree at all we shall do so instantly."

Sked had been standing with his hand on the door-knob, and when the lawyer concluded, answered:

"Richard Dundren."

"Hold on! Come back; sit down. Let me see the notes, we shall agree on terms."

The old man put his hat and umbrella on the floor again, and then unbuttoning his coat and shirt, drew out the greasy handkerchief, which at an earlier hour he had produced at Dundren's house. Extricating from one of its many knots the notes of hand, he desired to have collected, he showed them to Travis. The lawyer recognized Dundren's signature at once. He had never before seen it attached to a promissory note. Here was an opportunity to pull down his rival and secure a nomination for Congress. In availing himself of it, however, his hand, for several reasons, must not be seen. He must not do anything to give offense to Gertrude Frazier. Again, if he were to prosecute a case against Dundren, there might spring up a feeling of sympathy with the farmer, which, in an agricultural district, would render his own election impossible.

But these difficulties could be easily avoided. Any one of a half dozen attorneys of small practice would be glad to do the business for him, and ostensibly assume all the responsibility. It was very clear to the

mind of this wily politician that, after the commencement of the suit Dundren could not expend the money requisite to enable him to succeed, and for this reason would probably at once withdraw from the contest.

"I'll do this work," said Travis, "on your own terms upon one condition."

"What condition?"

"That I shall be permitted to put it in the hands of another lawyer and not appear in the case myself."

Peter never had much confidence in men, and now suspected this was a trick to cheat him; but the lawyer was sharp enough to divine the thought uppermost in the old man's mind, and therefore continued:

"I shall receipt to you for the notes. Without your endorsement they would be valueless to any one but yourself, and the judgment must necessarily be rendered on them in your favor. I shall be responsible to you for the proper management of the business, and will draw up the petition myself. All I ask is to have another appear of record as the attorney in the case; and I am free to say to you I desire this simply because I cannot afford to offend Dundren and drive away his friends by appearing against him, and yet I desire as much as you that the matter shall be pushed at once."

"Well, well," said Sked, "I don't care who appears as the attorney, so the business is properly done — that is all I want."

"Shall I take the case?"

Sked's little eyes blazed like coals of fire as he asked:

"On what terms? How much? Eh?"

"Say five hundred dollars. This would be one-fifth the usual fee."

"No."

"Two hundred and fifty. This would not pay for the responsibility I assume, to say nothing of the labor."

"No."

"One hundred. This would be nothing, really nothing for the collection of so large a sum."

"No."

"Fifty! I should be compelled to pay treble this amount to my assistant."

"No."

"Why, my gad! man, what do you expect to have it done for?" exclaimed the lawyer, now thoroughly angry.

"An hour's work is, may be worth a shilling," replied Sked calmly; "a dollar would be exorbitant."

"We shall not dispute about trifles," said Travis, trying to conceal his vexation. "I'll do it for a dollar."

"I'll see, I'll see. I shall be around again in a month or two," responded Sked, "and will perhaps call on you again. It would not be entirely fair to spoil Dundren's chances of a nomination. Eh? He is my cousin, you know, by marriage, and I have a good deal of family pride, and would like to have my cousin in Congress, and may be when he draws his salary he will be better prepared to pay his debts."

"Well, I'll be d——d," cried Travis in a towering rage. "What do you mean you dirty, old fool, by thrusting yourself in here and wasting my time. I thought you wanted the claim collected. I thought—"

"I do," said Sked, coolly, for he was not at all

deficient in courage, and did not propose to be intimidated.

"Then what do you mean by this trifling?" continued the lawyer savagely; "this wasting of an hour or more of my valuable time."

"I mean to say it would be money in your pocket to make the collection, eh? It would give you the lead in the race for Congress, eh? Do you understand? It would put your most formidable competitor out of the way. That's what I mean, eh?"

The lawyer was amazed at the impudence, shrewdness and meanness of his client, but he understood him now, and therefore said:

"Very well, I'll give you fifty dollars."

"Make it one hundred and draw up the contract. Ready money, cash in hand. 'Squire, you know it will save you a thousand."

"All right, I'll do it."

On this basis the contract for the collection of the claim against Dundren was drawn up, carefully supervised by Sked, and signed by the lawyer. Then the one hundred dollars were paid over, tied up in the handkerchief and carefully secreted in the old man's clothes.

One might naturally conclude that Sked left the lawyer's office in the best of humor, chuckling over the transaction of profitable business, but such a conclusion would be far from correct. He was angry with himself for not insisting upon five hundred dollars instead of one.

"Dod-blast it!" he exclaimed as he trudged down the middle of the street on his way to the country, "he would have given five hundred and then would have saved much money. I was too fast; I committed

myself too quick; I should have stood out for three hundred more at least — certainly two. I have lost much money to-night by my senseless haste. Why, dod-blast it! Peter," he cried, shaking his umbrella angrily, "you're a fool, eh! an extravagant fool! You've lost four hundred dollars to-night; two hundred at the very least. I am sure he would have paid three more, Peter. It would have been a great saving to him to have paid four, but I'll put the loss at three. Three hundred in seven years would have amounted to six, in fourteen to twelve, in twenty-one to twenty-four, in twenty-eight to forty-eight, in thirty-five to ninety-six, in forty-two to nineteen thousand two hundred, in forty-nine to thirty-eight thousand four hundred. Why dod-blast it, man, you've lost a fortune this very night. You've allowed the lawyer to rob you, sir! You must do better than this, Peter, or you'll die in a poor-house. You should have a guardian; you're not competent to make a bargain, you're a fool in business." Then the old man's voice softened to a pleading and pathetic whine as he continued: "Sked, you're too hard on me. I am quite sure if I had not made the offer I did while he was hot and eager to crush his rival, he would have given nothing. I think, good sir, I had reached the point where it was well to strike and not stop to higgle for a larger sum. I'm quite sure if I had stuck for more he would have kicked me out." And now we hear an admonitory and scoffing voice: "Bah! Peter, you're soft, and liable to be plucked right and left by all who desire to feather their nests from the body of an innocent goose. Kicked you out, eh? No, no, he never kicks in the light. I know the honorable Andrew Jackson Travis, son of old Billy Travis, the Tumbletown butcher, very

well. He might wish for your death and burial, or rob you if he could without risk of detection, but he would do nothing he thought could by possibility subject him to bodily harm. He likes to feel that his bones are whole and his skin not ruptured; in short, he prides himself on being a statesman, not a fighter. He might have frozen you out by an assumption of icy dignity, Peter, or he might have reminded you that it was growing late, but his courage would never have lifted him to the height of a kick. No, Peter, you made a mistake in not insisting upon at least four hundred." The tone of the old man became plaintive now: "It may be as you say, Sked; it doubtless is as you say, good sir, and I'll be on my guard hereafter, on my guard, sir." Then with a voice of stern authority he continued: "You must make good the loss of this night, Peter. Mark you, man, we can not stand such losses; they will break us up."

Sked had by this time traveled beyond the scattering houses of the suburbs and reached the farms. It was a clear night and innumerable stars sparkled in the dark vault overhead. As he pressed on now talking to himself as was his habit, and at times relapsing into silence, he heard the bleating of a lamb in a field near by, and soon thereafter a dog came charging toward him, barking furiously, and this disturbed the sleepy cows lying in the dusty highway, near the barns, where night and morning they were milked. All this took Sked's thoughts back to Dundren's, and he began to talk about the farm.

"It's a good farm — the best in the county, by odds, and a full thousand acres, a little more in fact, for there was a surplus in the tract last purchased." Then after a pause his tone changed to one of expostu-

lation and mild censure. "Sked, you are too hard, good sir; it's a nice family, and Helen is the child of your own father's sister; you should not be hard on her and her's; you should not, truly." Then came another change indicating some slight exasperation. "Peter, you are a soft-hearted fool. Is it hard, do you say, for a man to claim what belongs to him? No, no, Peter, you're wide of the mark, as usual; it would be wrong not to do so. It would be encouraging deceit, fraud, violence, theft." "But Sked, you have had many a warm dinner at Richard Dundren's when other people were quick to shut their doors in your face. You have had many a good night's rest under his comfortable roof, when otherwise you would have sought shelter in a shed or slept in the open air. They have entertained you hospitably there, off and on, for more than twenty years, and now you would sell them out and turn them out, root and branch. Is not this rather hard, good sir? Come, now, speak up like an honest man and tell me if it is not a little hard?" The voice now changed to angry earnestness. "I tell you no, you simple-hearted fool! In demanding my own I but do my duty; I follow in this the strict letter of the law. I refuse to encourage the extravagance of one at the expense of another. I teach men a wholesome lesson to live within their means; I teach them not to pretend to be what they are not. You speak of dinners and lodgings; they have not been so many that you need to have mentioned them. If given freely, as you say they were, it would have been an insult to hospitality to offer compensation. If intended as a bribe to draw me on, and wheedle me out of money, the act was an unworthy one for which they are entitled to no favor. Come, now, Peter, you haven't the

impudence to claim that men should be influenced by bribes? For if you have, I shall make bold to say you are a scoundrel, sir."

Sked had by this time reached the crest of a hill, and from it looked down upon the twinkling street lamps of a city. It was not yet light enough to see what else lay before him, but as he descended the easy slope toward the valley, the eastern horizon became brighter, the darkness began to fade away, and objects near to him grew more and more distinct. He discerned now, off to his left, a level plain, like a great sheet of lead; while directly in front and to the right of him he saw the roofs, gables and chimneys of the city, with here and there columns of coal smoke rising, then toppling and hanging indecisively in the still air. Pretty soon he caught sight of the dark waters of a currentless river which bent in and out around the base of the elevated ground beyond it, on which the greater portion of the city lay; and then, near the junction of this sluggish stream with the leaden lake, he beheld a forest of masts, and plying among the vessels noisy little steam tugs with chimney tops in a luminous glow, and behind them long banners of black smoke which broadened and finally thinned out until it became, apparently, murky vapor, and made all manner of fantastic figures on the dull background of the sky.

IV

EBENEZER GUM

DUNDREN and his wife had many friends in Cranberry County, and yet it is perhaps true that the average citizen is not, as a rule, greatly depressed by the misfortunes of those who have been, in point of wealth and social standing, far above him. "Here," he is inclined to say, "I have been looking upon this man and touching my hat to him because I thought him wealthier than myself, but when the truth is known, I find him poorer." Those whose donations for charitable purposes have been surpassed by the gifts of a more generous hand, are apt to conclude: "Ah! well, it is easy enough to be liberal in the disbursement of other people's money." Those who control fewer acres and ride in poorer carriages, are not unlikely to remark: "Thank heaven, what we own we own." Those who, on the score of economy, wear cheaper clothing, will probably observe in confidence to their next door neighbor, "The clothes we wear are paid for." And so, for a multitude of reasons, people who were most charming in their treatment of us when we stood in the sunshine of prosperity, drop off one by one, until we are surprised to find ourselves nearly, if not quite, alone with our misfortunes. This is perhaps well, for men in trouble find little, if any, solace in companionship. That practical sympathy which stands ready to make tangible sacrifices for our relief is so rare that sensible men seldom look for it, and certainly never rely upon it.

Mr. Travis had hitherto been so frequent a visitor at Cherry Farm that his going to and from the place attracted little or no attention, but just now he purposely remained away. If he were to hasten to Dundren with his sympathy and offers of professional assistance, that gentleman might, under the circumstances, suspect the honesty of his motives. There was, he thought, a more effective way of accomplishing the end he had in view, and to this he had immediate recourse. In the presence of Dundren's personal friends he denounced the Sked claim as fraudulent, and affirmed that the case would be promptly dismissed by the court without the formality of a trial."

"You must be mistaken, Mr. Travis," they would say, "the sheriff——"

"Not at all; I know Sked, the plaintiff; he is a worthless tramp who never had money enough to buy a decent and comfortable suit of clothes. The idea that anybody owes him eighty thousand dollars is simply preposterous."

"But Mr. Travis, Dundren admits the claim, and will make no defense against it."

"You must be wrong. As I have already said, I know old Peter Sked, and am quite sure he never possessed a dollar in his life. I think the man from whom you heard the story is mistaken; in fact, I know he must be!"

"But Dundren is no longer a candidate. He would not have withdrawn at this late day if there were not some urgent reason for it."

"Well, well, he may have done that; I am quite sure, however, he had some reason for withdrawing other than the one suggested."

By thus defending Dundren against the doubts and fears of that gentleman's best friends, Mr. Travis raised himself considerably in their esteem, and secured the support of many men who would, in the absence of these professions of friendliness, have ridden the county day and night to accomplish his defeat.

The Congressional Convention was to be held on the 25th of June, and as it was now the middle of that month, Mr. Travis' time was fully occupied. There were many whom he esteemed friends to be stimulated into activity, and many more whom he regarded as enemies to be quieted. The former were at best but lukewarm, the latter generally bitter, and not a few of them vindictive. To the one class he made personal appeals for help; and upon the other brought to bear such influences as he deemed most effective. But by far the greater number of those who thronged his office as the day for choosing the nominating delegates approached, entertained no feeling whatever either for or against the candidate. They were ward or township politicians of unsavory reputation, and little influence, known to be purchasable, who on one pretext or another extorted money from him which never went beyond their pockets until expended for their own personal benefit.

It being now generally understood that there would be no other candidate in Cranberry, Mr. Travis, on the day of the primaries, succeeded in securing a solid delegation from his own county to the district convention, and as it was, by the rule of alternation hitherto mentioned, the turn of this county to have the candidate, he was in due time nominated for Congress, by acclamation.

The honorable Alexander Hamilton Popper, the Republican candidate and Mr. Travis' opponent in this contest, was a gentleman by no means deficient in political cunning, nor in ability to make the race an interesting one. Although not a member of any church organization, he nevertheless prided himself on his morality and was somewhat demonstrative in his support of religious enterprises. From the elevation on which he stood it was an easy matter to make excursions to the right or left in search of helpers, and to levy contributions from the powers of light and darkness. Still he was strictly moral and naturally religious, and if he ever coquetted with Satan it was to deceive the rascal and make good use of him. It was the prevailing tendency of Mr. Popper's thought in the direction of noble objects which led him to write to Deacon Ebenezer Gum that he would be pleased to meet him at as early a day as possible with a view to a consultation on important business connected with the present alarming condition of the country.

Gum was a well preserved man of fifty-five, whose long, narrow, smoothly-shaven face, broad brimmed, low crowned hat, and clothing of sober color and antiquated cut, betokened that his affections had been weaned from the follies in which a wicked and adulterous generation takes delight, and concentrated on a period of the near future when, through his own efforts mainly, mankind would be purged of all social and political uncleanness, and made to stand up an everlasting monument of his superior goodness.

Time had not dealt as tenderly with the hairs of Ebenezer's wig as a humane and gentle heart might wish; from a lovely brown they had been converted,

by its inexorable hand, to a faded and dirty yellow. And there were spaces also where the wig was bald, the hairs of it possibly having been shaken out by the tremendous throbbings of the active mental engine underneath.

In early life the Deacon had been a shoemaker, and as was natural for one in the leather line, had given much attention to the soles of men, and pegged and mended them until he become very proficient in the art. But at last finding this pursuit restrictive, monotonous and unsuited to one of high aspirations, he diverted his thoughts from soles to souls, studied divinity at odd hours of the day and night, and finally leaving his bench, became the spiritual adviser of a congregation which assembled for worship at Wild Cat meeting-house. The Sunday collections at this outpost of duty, however, were not of such magnitude as fully to meet his generous expectations, and consequently his religious fervor abated gradually until it ceased altogether, when, abandoning his charge, he entered the political arena and became the recognized and trusted leader of the Prohibitionists of his immediate locality.

Although the revenue derived from this last position was by no means munificent, he nevertheless managed to subsist on it quite comfortably, and at the same time make himself exceedingly useful to the country by elevating the popular conscience to a higher political standard. His devotion to the principles of temperance and reform, however, did not deter him from indicating a neighborly willingness to make himself useful to Mr. Travis in the convention which had just concluded its labors; but as that gentleman had ascertained there would be no opposition to his nomination,

he did not deem it advisable to go to the expense of carrying with him to that body a living and unimpeachable witness to his high character and good habits. If, however, Mr. Travis had employed Ebenezer to testify to his personal worth, he would have discharged the duty assigned him, with scrupulous fidelity, and immediately thereafter felt at liberty to render a like service to any one or all of the many aspirants of the opposite party.

It may not be generally known how a gentleman of Brother Gum's standing could be made useful in an assembly composed of men who did not profess to believe in his peculiar political tenets; but in every party there are elements more or less inharmonious to be reconciled. There are, for instance, the radical man and the conservative; the bold and the cautious. The man whose interest, and possibly habits, make him the advocate of free rum, and the man who is opposed to the unlicensed, or even the licensed traffic in intoxicating liquors. Men holding every shade and variety of views respecting the revenue laws; men who pride themselves on their standing in the church; men who have no religious convictions whatever. Men who believe secret societies exert a wholesome influence in the community, and those who regard them as dangerous to the well being of the state. Men hostile to all members of the learned professions, and those who have no confidence in farmers and workingmen as lawmakers. Men who favor corporations, and those who would restrict them, or abolish them altogether.

To reconcile a body in which so many diverse creeds, opinions and temperaments are represented, and lead it up to a common purpose requires the discreet use of many, apparently, antagonistic influences;

and now that the popular mind had become in some degree sensitive on the temperance question, a gentleman of Brother Gum's antecedents, so far as the general public knew of them, was especially valuable, and hence it was that almost every convention and altogether every election was made to contribute to his income.

Brother Ebenezer had had too much attention from candidates to be at all inflated by the letter received from the Honorable Mr. Popper, but he never failed to respond promptly when called to the performance of a political duty, and therefore saddled his mouse-colored mare, rode leisurely northward from Cranberry town for a few miles until he came to a cross-road, then turned westward and proceeded to another intersection of the highways, where, turning directly to the south, he increased the speed of the mare and continued until the dusk of evening, when, after a brisk ride of thirty miles, he drew up in front of a comfortable dwelling in a neighboring county seat. Hitching his animal to a post which stood conveniently near the gateway, the Deacon crossed the space intervening between the road and the residence, and rang the door-bell. A moment thereafter Mr. Popper appeared, and recognizing his visitor, exclaimed:

"It is Mr. Gum. My good sir, I was just thinking of you and am rejoiced to meet you. Come in."

After the visitor's appetite had been so fully satisfied that he could not be induced to indulge it further, the interview on the state of the country began.

"You are aware, Mr. Gum," said Popper, deliberately, and with an air of exceeding soberness, "that my sympathies have always been with the cause of

temperance; that I am practically a teetotaler. It would not, however, be politic for me to express my views on this subject too strongly in my public utterances. I have, therefore, sought this opportunity to assure you, the recognized leader of the Prohibitionists of Cranberry County, that if elected I shall do my utmost, sir——" Here Mr. Popper paused for a moment to give Brother Ebenezer time to estimate the immensity of the service modestly alluded to by the feeble word, utmost — "my utmost, sir, to advance the cause you have at heart."

Ebenezer cast his eyes devoutly to the ceiling before giving expression orally to the intense joy which filled his heart at this blessed assurance, and then said:

"To be frank and honest with you, my honored sir, I must confess that I have had my doubts as to the precise tendency of your influence — you must pardon me, my friend — perhaps my own great anxiety with respect to the subject led me to fear, possibly, your influence might not be exerted on the side of temperance and reform; but now my doubts are dispelled, and I shall leave you with a lighter heart."

"Do you think you could aid me in this important contest, Mr. Gum?" Popper inquired eagerly.

"I should be glad to do it, sir. The assurance you have given makes me feel as if I ought to do it, Mr. Popper, and yet I must not be unfaithful to my party, sir. No, no, Mr. Popper, I must be loyal to it. But I am quite sure you have the opportunity to do the cause a power of good."

"But, my dear Gum, your party cannot elect a man to the place, would it not be wisdom, therefore, to concentrate your votes on me — would it not be far

better, indeed, than to fritter them away on one who stands no possible chance of success?"

"Well, well, that is a question — that is a question, Mr. Popper, for one's conscience and judgment to determine," replied Gum, meditatively. "I do not know — I have sometimes thought it would — and — and at other times that it would not; really the question puzzles me."

"How strong is your party in Cranberry, Mr. Gum?" said Popper, softly, as if while putting the question he was ransacking his own mind for some expeditious method of ridding the world of tippling houses, and thus bringing about a social millennium. "How many votes can it poll?"

"The vote varies considerably," replied Gum slowly, as if making a careful estimate; "when no great effort is made to bring it out, the vote is small, but when the party is thoroughly aroused the votes will number three hundred. I think this year the full strength of the party will be polled. I should say three hundred, sir, at least."

"How many of them," said Popper still endeavoring to solve the great moral problem uppermost in his mind, and regarding his question as immaterial to the main issue, "how many of these votes could you throw for me if you saw it was your duty as a temperance man to do so — if you really felt you would be giving your principles practical assistance, sir? How many, Mr. Gum?"

"I should say, at a rough estimate, two hundred and seventy-five — no, I fear this would be putting it too high. Two hundred and fifty would be nearer the figure, Mr. Popper, providing I was authorized to assure them on my honor that they might rely on you.

I would not even entertain the proposition to do it otherwise. A man's honor is a sacred thing, Mr. Popper, and must not be lightly pledged; still I have little heart for the task, for it would require a heap of labor."

"But what better thing could you do? You know there's no hope for any candidate you might put in the field. You know exactly where I stand. Now as an honest man, desirous of doing what you can for reform, and the promotion of temperance, what better can you do?"

"Your argument seems sound and you put it forcibly, Mr. Popper, very forcibly, I must confess," said Gum as if almost convinced that duty required him to yield; "but then, my friend, the labor of seeing all these voters privately, and arguing the question with them, and putting them in the field to work is no light task, and would be attended with more or less expense. You are aware, sir, that I am a poor man and have little time and less money to spare in an enterprise that will profit me nothing."

"But is it not a religious duty, Mr. Gum, is it not a duty binding on your conscience?"

"It looks like it; I fear I must say it is. Yes, it is impossible to escape the force of your logic, Mr. Popper, and whatever it may be possible for a man of my means and opportunities to accomplish, shall be done. I promise you that, but I shall not be able to devote my whole time to the work; and yet I would be glad to do so, for when I take hold of a thing I like to do it with all my might; still you may rely on me to do what I can — what a man who depends for a livelihood on his daily labor, can reasonably do."

"But I should like you to see all the members of your party," said Popper eagerly; "to impress upon them the necessity of working and voting for me."

"That would be impossible to one situated as I am," replied Gum, decisively; "utterly out of the question. My family would starve while I was doing it, and I should be compelled to beg my way from house to house."

"But how much would it cost to do the work in this thorough way, Mr. Gum — how much?"

"It never occurred to me to make the estimate, Mr. Popper. It is too far beyond my own means to render it worth my while to count up the exact cost."

"Could it be done for a hundred dollars?"

"Not for three times that sum, sir; I think it safe to say not for four times that amount, sir. You travel ten miles to see a man, and find he is not at home; you call again, he may be there and may not, but if he is you talk the matter over for an hour, possibly for a whole afternoon, for such things must be discreetly done, not hastily. There are three hundred of these men; you can estimate yourself the time required to see them all, and how much the expense of such a work is likely to foot up. I should say five hundred dollars would not pay the cost."

"That's a large sum," said Popper firmly.

"Too large, too large for one man to lose or another to pay," replied Gum heartily. "It was for this reason I regarded your suggestion as impracticable."

"But, don't you think, Mr. Gum, if I were to give you three hundred dollars you could undertake the work and do it thoroughly?"

"I should say it would take five at the very least; still I would willingly pinch myself and submit to

many sacrifices in order to discharge a duty. If you will make it four hundred I will undertake the work. I fear five will not cover the outlay required; still I am not the man to stand on a few dollars when a matter of principle is at stake. I'll undertake it for four."

The candidate quit his seat and walked the floor meditatively for five minutes, then turning to Ebenezer thanked him for the generous offer and paid over the money. He did not desire to part with so much, but he did want to be elected, and after he had concluded to strike a bargain he was wise enough to know it was best to do it cheerfully, as if he were receiving instead of conferring a favor. An intimation that the sum asked was exorbitant might have irritated his visitor and rendered him an indifferent worker, if not a secret enemy.

In the gray of the next morning Brother Ebenezer ate his breakfast at Mr. Popper's hospitable board, and charged by the fair Mrs. Popper with good wishes and pleasant messages for Mrs. Gum, mounted his plump mouse-colored mare and started northward just four hundred dollars richer than he was the day before. It was not far beyond the middle of the afternoon when, having passed beyond the town and then turning eastward and then southward he trotted into Cranberry from the north, without any of his fellow townsmen having even the remotest suspicion that he had been visiting Mr. Travis' competitor for congressional honors.

After a brief interview with Mr. Travis a few days later, in which the alarming condition of the country was discussed with great plainness, and in utter forgetfulness of the eternal principles to which Brother Ebenezer professed allegiance, the latter gentleman

began to prepare for inexpensive rides into the country. To do this it was only necessary to make out a list of personal acquaintances at whose houses he might stop and be quite certain to secure good dinners and comfortable lodgings without cost. It is not by any means an undesirable thing to be the recognized leader of a political party, even if it be a small one, for such a man not only has opportunities to elevate the standard of public morals, but to turn an honest penny from the candidate's pocket to his own.

V

GINGER

WHILE the two leading political parties were adjusting their lines for the approaching conflict, Mr. Dundren was actively endeavoring to find a purchaser for his land and live stock; but money was by no means abundant, and those who had the little there was, knew good mortgage notes bearing the current rate of interest would in the end prove more profitable than the most productive farm; and so no attention was given to his proposition to sell at much less than he considered the property worth.

On the first day of the August term the attorney to whom Mr. Travis had entrusted the Sked claim, asked permission of the court to have judgment entered for the amount. The case was thereupon called, and as no one appeared to make objection, the clerk was directed to prepare the entry usual in similar cases. The action of the court made Sked's claim a first lien on the real estate, but in obedience to the order of the plaintiff's attorney, the sheriff rode out to Cherry farm in the evening, and levied on the personal property. He had, under the law, sixty days in which to make return of his writ of execution, and having now discharged his duty to the creditor fully, he was inclined to be as lenient as possible to the debtor. But Mr. Dundren had ceased to regard time as important to him. He had diligently sought a purchaser, and failed to find one, and had no reason to suppose delay would

result otherwise than to increase the claim against him by additional interest and costs. He, therefore, requested the sheriff to have appraisers selected and the property brought to sale as soon as possible.

The wishes of the debtor in these particulars were complied with. The appraisers estimated the land at one hundred thousand dollars, and the personal property, embracing live stock and farming utensils at forty thousand; two-thirds of the former sum would be sixty-six thousand six hundred and sixty-six dollars; if the personalty sold proportionately well, the proceeds of both would pay the debt, and leave Dundren ten thousand dollars with which to begin life anew. The occupants of Cherry farm were therefore, greatly encouraged, and Mr. Dundren, himself, felt almost happy over the prospect of getting rid of an oppressive burden, with enough left to keep him out of the poorhouse.

The latter part of August came, and with it the day appointed for the sale. The people who attended it were mostly farmers, and there was a great collection of buggies and other vehicles in the road near Dundren's house. The live stock and farm implements were to be sold unconditionally, but the land must bring two-thirds of its appraised value, if it sold at all. As the morning wore on the sheriff ascended a horse block, so that every body could see him, and announced that the hour had come when the sale was advertised to begin. After reading the notice required by law on such occasions, he said he would offer the land first because the man who had the good luck to get it might want the live stock and farm implements, and for the further reason that if the land brought what it was

worth it would not be necessary to put anything else to sale.

Old Peter Sked was sitting on a bench some little distance from the sheriff. He was angry. The land had, in his opinion, been appraised at more than its actual value. The scoundrelly appraisers had been bribed; they were in league with Dundren. This was evident enough. He might pay sixty-six thousand for the land, personal property and all, but to be required to give that much for the land alone, and allow Dundren to get away with most of the live stock and farming utensils was such a high handed outrage on an honest money-lender as none but a parcel of dishonest farmers would dare to perpetrate. Dod-blast it! he would not be extorted from. If somebody else did not bid enough to pay his claim he would allow the property to be advertised and offered again. In this way Sked went on talking to Peter, his tender hearted partner, who, after being soundly rated for getting into the difficulty, plucked up the courage to suggest that the farm alone would be cheap at eighty-five thousand, but Sked retorted, angrily:

"Tut, tut, man you're a fool. I can make more off half the money."

"But, Sked," said Peter coaxingly, "this would be an absolutely safe investment; the land would neither burn nor run away."

"But the buildings might burn. I say, Peter, you're a fool to think of giving eighty-five thousand. Why, man, does that seem a trifling sum to you? A sum to be thrown away? Eh? In a little over seven years one hundred and seventy thousand, fourteen, three hundred and forty thousand, twenty-one years three months and twenty-eight days, six hundred and

eighty thousand, in less than thirty-five years two million seven hundred and twenty thousand; in a little over forty-two years, five million, four hundred and forty thousand; in less than fifty years ten million eight hundred and eighty thousand dollars. Why, dod-blast it, Peter, you're crazy — a raving lunatic; you might till this farm a thousand years and not make half that amount. Ten per cent. beats the world, Peter! No, no; I'll not buy." And as nobody else did, the sheriff, marking on his writ, "No bidders for the land," turned his attention to the personal property, and proceeded to offer the horses, cattle and sheep.

Dundren stood well with the people of Cranberry County, and to-day he was surrounded by sturdy farmers who thought if a man ever needed friends it was when the roof which sheltered his family was being exposed to sale by the sheriff. They were not able to make so large a purchase, but had a stranger bought the farm, they would have bid and bid lively on the personal property with a view to putting it on him at the highest possible price. As the land did not sell, however, and as it would be comparatively valueless to Dundren without the live stock and farm implements, there were some whispered consultations, and subsequently much pleasant talk and considerable chaffing of the sheriff by those who knew he would take it kindly; but there were no bidders and no sales. Finally the officer of the law, assuming an air of indignation, which all recognized as transparent hypocrisy, said the men before him were a dull and empty lot of fellows, on whom he had wasted too much of his valuable time; he should therefore, announce the sale closed and bid them all get off the premises forthwith.

As Sked walked away in an angry mood, Peter

sought to console him somewhat with the suggestion that there was property enough to pay the debt and meantime it was drawing a fair rate of interest. But Sked was so dissatisfied over the poor results of the day that he traveled five miles without stopping, then begged a cold lunch and went on his way. It was fully ten o'clock when he sought lodging in a pile of straw, which, after passing through the threshing machine, had been left in a field adjacent to the highway. It was a pleasant night and the bed he found was soft and dry, but what commended it most strongly to Sked was the fact that it would cost him nothing. Peter had frequently warned his co-partner that if he continued to spend the nights in barns, stables and open fields, he might take such a cold as would insure him a permanent resting place under the sod, and now suggested the same thought again; but Sked sneered at Peter's admonitions.

"Why, sir," he said, "don't you know warm, badly ventilated rooms cause the death of millions, eh? The air becomes poisonous, the system becoming over heated grows soft and liable to take on disease. Why, you self indulgent fool! Look at the cattle and horses, the wild beasts; they are flesh and blood like ourselves, eh? Do they get sick and send for the doctors to make them sicker? Eh? Now do they? Not often, Peter, not often. They have sense enough to live in the open air, and not shut themselves up in heated and unwholesome rooms."

"But, Sked," said Peter, "you have not, I hope, forgotten the terrible cold and the pneumonia resulting from it, which nearly killed you eight or more years ago?"

"No, no; I forget nothing, Peter. The day when

I contracted that cold was raw and wet, and I got soaked to the skin; but since then I have secured this umbrella, and am taking care of myself."

Sked now rose to a sitting posture, and taking the faded umbrella from the ground, removed the string which held it shut, and opening it, inspected it as carefully as he could by the dim light of a declining half moon. There were a few wires loose, a rent in the muslin, and the spring of the handle had lost its elasticity; but it was nevertheless an umbrella, and had been for at least ten years. Sked evidently regarded it with satisfaction, for when he laid it down he remarked confidently:

"No danger now, Peter, no danger, man; I shall live as long as old Parr. What a fortune that man would have accumulated if he had doubled up his money every seven years of his life. Eh, Peter?"

"But Methusaleh would have beaten him," replied Peter jocosely.

"You are right, my man," responded Sked; "suppose Methusaleh had started in life with ten thousand dollars, and loaned at ten per cent., compounding annually, and doubling up every seven years or thereabouts, what would he have been worth at the day of his death? Eh? How much? There's a sum for you."

"What good would it have done him after death?" asked Peter softly. "What good, Sked? When you answer that I'll figure out the sum."

"Think of life, Peter, not death; let us choose to be cheerful, my man, when the choice costs nothing."

"But we must sometime think of death," said Peter solemnly. "Who will bury us when we die?"

"What matter, what matter, man," replied Sked

angrily; "since we shall be unconscious and rest as comfortably in the ditch as in the church yard."

"Sked, do you still mind the child — the little girl," said Peter in husky tones, "who died twenty years ago? She was of your own flesh and blood — your daughter, Sked. You denied her the food and clothing needed to keep her healthful. You put her in the care of a drunken, disreputable nurse — you killed your own child, man!"

There was a pause here in the soliloquy which, by chance, was occupied by the solemn hooting of an owl, and then Sked cried in angry tones:

"Peter, you lie like hell!"

"I tell the honest truth," returned Peter, with sobbing voice; "she lacked food, clothing and comfortable shelter. She lacked the companionship of the young, and a mother's care."

The tears were now streaming from the old man's eyes; the one soft spot in his hardened soul was touched and bleeding, possibly, not the only one indeed, for even the worst men have streaks of tenderness. After a while he said in reply to his accusing conscience:

"I could not prevent the mother's death, Peter. You are unjust when accusing me of depriving Mary of a mother's care. I loved the child, and God knows — if there be a God to know — how sincerely I wish she were living now."

"Too late, too late," muttered Peter sadly. "The time was when, if you had loved money less and the child more, she would have been saved to you. She would perhaps have been a mother now with her bright-faced children to romp with you when you were in the humor; to greet you as grandfather always,

then — then your pinchings and hoardings would have been to some purpose, Sked — to some purpose."

The old man was awakened in the early morning by a vigorous shake. Springing to his feet he flourished his umbrella threateningly at two young men who stood near him, and cried:

"Stand back, don't come an inch nearer, or I'll brain ye! Keep off!"

The men laughed heartily at this exhibition of temper and alarm, but finally one of them controlled his merriment sufficiently to say in an authoritative tone:

"Come, come, neighbor, we rise early at this tavern, and expect our guests to keep in a good humor."

"What d' ye say?" shouted Sked, still keeping his umbrella in position to repel any sudden attack; "hey? Do you own this straw pile, eh?"

"It is common property, my venerable sir, but it is the custom of those who lodge here not to lie abed a-taking of their ease after sunrise. We simply desired you to conform to the rules of the establishment. Come, we shall have roast goose for breakfast; join us."

The speaker now drew from its place of concealment in the straw, a fowl which he had secured in the darkness of the preceding night, and his companion, taking from the ground a dirty bundle, the three men proceeded to the road together. Sked was not disposed to be social, but he was somewhat hungry, and when the vagabonds by a few pleasant words had mollified his anger and dissipated his suspicions, he assented readily enough to accompany them to a wooded valley through which a brook rippled, and there share their morning meal. While the old man and one of the

strangers were plucking the goose, the other kindled a fire, and then proceding with considerable alacrity to a neighboring cornfield, returned with an armful of roasting ears, which he stripped of the husks and laid on the coals.

"Goose," said Sked's companion to him confidentially, "is the juiciest of domestic fowls; but when not thoroughly cooked, somewhat difficult for a toothless man to masticate. I trust, my reverend sir, your grinders are in good condition?"

"What d'ye say, eh?" responded Sked, absently.

"Beg pardon," shouted the tramp, as if possibly the old man's hearing was defective, "but your name has escaped my memory, and yet I know it is an ancient and honorable one — a famous name in fact, but to save my life I can't recall it on the instant."

"Sked," said the old man, curtly, "Sked is my name."

"True enough," continued the man as he laid the goose on the coals, "I should have known it very well, but my memory is remarkable for forgetting names. I have sometimes found it necessary to be introduced to my most intimate friends several times — gentlemen with whom I have had transactions of a pecuniary nature, but I now recollect distinctly that your name is Shed —"

'Sked, sir; Sked."

"— And if I am not exceedingly wide of the mark your front name is Jeremiah; am I not correct?"

"You are not; it is Peter."

"So it is, so it is," the tramp continued cheerfully, "I got the Biblical characters for a moment mixed. Peter Sked, a name elegant enough for the hero of a

romance. Judge Mustard, be kind enough to stimulate the fire."

The Judge, as he was called, raked the coals together and laid a few dry sticks on them.

"We are highly honored to-day," resumed the man who supervised the cooking, addressing the Judge, "by the presence of our reverend friend, Bishop Peter Sked, and we trust he will make himself at home with us and partake heartily of the goose. If my intellect is not wholly out of joint he is a gentleman who can appreciate a nicely cooked fowl. Sked, Sked, Peter Sked, I have seen that name in a society journal in connection with a romantic episode — an elopement with another man's — nay, I think it was a giddy and wayward girl. Ah, Sked, you gay deceiver, how could you do it? But the power of some men over the fair sex is wonderful! Judge Mustard, would you have thought that of Bishop Peter Sked? Look at him and decide under the solemnities of your official oath!"

"Mind the goose, Ginger, and give your imagination a rest," said the Judge sharply.

"Well, well," resumed Ginger in a regretful tone, "I shall never more have faith in solemn visaged men, never. I am not easily astonished by freaks of human nature, but I must confess it was a surprise to me to hear that the Reverend Bishop Sked had dashed down on Saratoga — I believe, by gad, it was Newport, in the height of the season, eloped with the reigning belle, and though hotly pursued by two fond parents and a dozen rivals, succeeded in marrying the girl, and securing a million or two invested in government sixes. My reverend sir, while as a gentleman of standing and the prospective father of a family, I cannot approve of your conduct on that occasion, I nevertheless welcome

you to these halls, and am proud to give you hospitable entertainment. Judge Mustard, look up a flat, smooth surfaced stone to lay the goose on."

The Judge found the article desired in the shallow waters of the little creek, brought it to the fire and laid it on the ground beside Ginger. The goose being put upon it, was divided into three nearly equal parts, two of which Ginger presented to his companions on the point of his knife, and the other retained for himself. It may be there is more palatable food for hungry men than a well cooked goose, supplemented by nicely roasted corn; but if so, Sked and his entertainers had never met it. This feast was simply delicious to them.

"The goose," said Mr. Ginger, with the air and deliberation of a philosopher who proposed to discuss the subject in an unimpassioned way, "is mysterious in its origin, useful in life for its annual supply of feathers, and invaluable in death as food for hungry men. Tell me, Bishop Peter Sked, how do you account for the existence of the goose?"

The Bishop was too much engaged to give the subject the consideration it deserved; but he recognized the importance of it by observing briefly:

"The egg, sir. The fowl comes from the egg."

Ginger stared at the Bishop in astonishment, then looking at the Judge with the air of one to whom an important secret had been revealed, said:

"True as the gospel, my reverend sir. Now tell me my learned father whence cometh the egg?"

It was not a time for the Bishop to go into details, and so he replied:

"From the goose."

"Sir, your knowledge on this subject is marvelous — the egg from the goose and the goose from the egg!

But tell me, my reverend sir, which existed first, the goose or the egg? I refer now to that remote period when the first goose and the first egg appeared on the face of the earth; which is the elder — which came first?"

"I don't know!" gruffly replied Sked.

"My dear Bishop, you're too modest. I think you could enlighten me on this point if you would; still I shall not urge you further, and yet the question is one over which I have pondered seriously for many years, and I cannot at this time avoid the painful reflection that we should possibly have gone without a breakfast if that first, original egg had become addled or broken, or the first goose perished in infancy. Thus it is, we of the present find ourselves indebted for the food we eat to the pre-historic past, to that far off period when the first goose was a fragile gosling. Sir, do you realize fully the narrowness of our escape from starvation? But to change the topic somewhat, tell me, my good Bishop, upon what theory do men claim to own geese, and forbid others to appropriate them for food or feathers?"

Sked's last mouthful was so nearly disposed of that he was prepared to answer at some length.

"On the theory, sir, that men should own and control what they make — what they care for and preserve — what would not exist but for their watchfulness and foresight, eh?"

"My reverend sir, your theory has nothing to stand on — it is legless. Did man create either egg or goose? No; he lacks the power to make a living thing. Did man preserve the egg or goose? Impossible, for both antedated him. How can it be said then that what existed and multiplied before man came, exists now

only because of his watchfulness and foresight? Sir, a goose is common property, and so is land, and water and air. My reverend friend, you and I, and all other men are joint owners and equal partners; we own the world! When by hook or crook another gets more than his equal share he becomes a thief, and when I take from him what is needed to satisfy my wants I seize what nature intended for my special use."

The old man having finished his breakfast, now rose to his feet, and answered angrily:

"Then if I am industrious, watchful, painstaking, and sow and reap, eh? I have no special claim to what I gather — to what I save — to the corn and wheat which would not have grown but for my labor, patience and skill. You are an ass, sir!"

Ginger laughing at this display of temper, replied:

"Thank you, my reverend sir, for your courteous and gentle language, but who asked you to either sow or reap? By what right do you inclose a thousand acres of our common property, destroy its forests, and dig up its soil, when ten would be sufficient for all your natural wants? The people whom we succeed held these lands in common, and lived as happily, for aught you know, as men do now. The forests supplied them with fruit, and flesh for food, and skins for clothing, and the valleys gave them corn and what little else they needed. Now men are not satisfied to simply provide for their own wants, but grasp and hoard and hold while other and better men freeze and starve and die. This is a monstrous wrong, sir. The man who holds a thousand acres and needs but ten to keep him, and the man who hides away millions while

others are suffering for food, are robbers — robbers, my good sir."

"Well, well, have it your own way — it may be as you say. Good morning."

"Don't be in haste, my reverend sir," cried Ginger, as the old man was walking off, "a little argument will help digestion."

"Thank you, I must get on; I have far to go. Good day."

"Call again," shouted Ginger, "we keep open house."

Sked made no reply, but when he reached the road he muttered to himself:

"Open and wide and airy, but I think I prefer to be alone, for if these young men found I had money with me they might conclude two-thirds of it belonged to them, and when the two-thirds were gone they would probably decide to take two-thirds of the one-third, and so continue to make divisions until neither they nor I had a penny left."

VI

A STATESMAN

THE vagabonds had more time just now at their disposal than they needed. After idling away an hour or two of the morning in the grateful shadow of the trees, Mustard, who appeared to be the more practical and energetic member of the firm, extricated from his bundle a number of tiny glass phials such as druggists use to contain liquid medicines, and going to the creek filled them with water, corked them nicely, and then pasted on each a printed label bearing the words "Great American Ache Annihilator;" when this work was completed to his satisfaction, and his bundle rearranged, he notified the now recumbent and drowsy Ginger it was time to be moving, and without giving further attention to his companion, walked away.

Ginger rising, stretched himself and after a preliminary yawn, and a three minute speech on the folly of haste, and the wisdom of husbanding one's resources, started to follow his disappearing comrade.

It was perhaps three o'clock in the afternoon when the tramps entered Bearwood, a village of two thousand souls and a county seat. Horses attached to farm wagons and lighter vehicles were standing to hitching posts in front of stores and shops, and the sidewalks were filled with country people who had come to town to sell products of the farm and buy weekly supplies of merchandise. Many of these were clad in rough working clothes, and some of them not so well dressed

even as Ginger and Mustard. The two latter, therefore, were not at all likely to attract special attention to themselves by the shabbiness of their attire.

The vagabonds now separated, Mustard going to the opposite side of the street, walked slowly so that his companion might get well in advance of him. On reaching the center of the village Ginger stopped, drew an empty store-box to the curbstone, laid the phials which Mustard had filled at the creek upon it, and began to sing in a good, round pleasant voice. In less than five minutes half the unoccupied people of the town gathered about him, then he told amusing stories and finally entered upon a lively and eloquent eulogy of the great American Ache Annihilator, which he now offered for sale.

If the statements which Dr. Ginger made with respect to the curative powers of this medicine can be relied upon, it was the most valuable compound ever concocted by medical scientists. Thousands to whom life had become a burden had been rendered happy by the use of it.

"What is life," cried Ginger, "to one who has an aching ear, a throbbing tooth, or a griping stomach? He may be worth millions, and yet be miserable; he may have a pleasant home, a lovely wife, and an interesting family, and still wish he had never been born. All nature appears to his disturbed vision as if clad in the habiliments of woe."

"Come, now," he continued, "give me an opportunity to prove the remedy is all I represent it to be. If I fail to cure the most obstinate case, I shall throw my medicine away, and acknowledge myself a cheat."

Dr. Ginger's exhortation was here interrupted; a

man whose face was partially concealed with a bandage, pushing through the crowd, presented himself as a subject for medical attention.

"Hello!" shouted Ginger, "what is your jaw tied up for? It is the custom in this blessed country to let the jaw loose — to give it full play. Allow me to remove the bandage — there. Now, what's your name, my man?"

"Pigstaff, Jacob Pigstaff, sir."

"Ah, you come of a prolific family, Pigstaff, you are born in droves — when young, pig; later the prop of your parents, hence, staff. Now Pigstaff open your mouth and let me see what you had for dinner — a little wider, Pigstaff — never fear, I shall not crawl in. Ah! an ulcerated grinder, a quack would pull it; I shall not. It took nature twenty years to make it, and was intended to last through life. Is it of the jumping kind, Pigstaff?"

"Very jumpin', sir."

"I thought so; the cheek is swollen. It is as well developed as a politician's, Pigstaff. I have known cases of cheek no worse than this to carry men to — Congress. But never fear, Pigstaff, I shall save you. Now let me put just one drop of the great American Ache Annihilator on your tongue. It will not do to waste the medicine, for it is precious. Hold the liquid in your mouth and allow it to mingle with the saliva. Fellow citizens, the teeth of thousands of people young and old have been saved by the timely application of this remedy. It not only quiets the nerve, soothes the irritation, but hardens the bone and in time gives to it the whiteness of ivory. No cure, no pay, is my motto. I despise a humbug and abhor a quack. Swallow the fluid Pigstaff and tell us how you feel."

"Well," responded the patient.

"Does the tooth ache at all — are there any throbbings at the root — any sensations of pain whatever?"

"Not as I feels, sir."

"Not as Pigstaff feels, gentlemen. If there were any, Pigstaff would be more likely to feel them than anybody else. Are you satisfied, Pigstaff?"

"I am, sir."

"Well, then, depart in peace. Now, gentlemen and ladies, if you desire to buy, do so at once, or I shall discontinue the sale. I have already spent time enough to sell a hundred bottles — thank you — two bottles for one dollar; will you take two? That's right — that's sensible. They will last your family for years, and save the expenditure of a hundred dollars to dentists." And thus Dr. Ginger continued until he had disposed of all the phials filled by Mustard at the creek.

At eight o'clock in the evening Dr. Ginger delivered an eloquent and amusing speech from the balcony of the village hotel in support of the issues presented by the Greenback party, and at ten o'clock was so hopelessly and helplessly intoxicated that Mustard found it necessary to obtain assistance to carry him to a bed.

Mr. Travis had been sitting in the office of the Bearwood hotel enjoying an after dinner cigar, while Dr. Ginger was delivering his eloquent appeal in favor of the unlimited issue of paper money, and it occurred to him that the orator could be made useful in the Cranberry district. The Greenback party was neither a large nor compact body, but in almost every voting precinct a few members of it could be found, enough,

in brief, to render their action of considerable importance in a close election.

Not desiring to negotiate with Ginger directly, Mr. Travis authorized a professional friend whom he had been assisting in a law case, to attend to the matter, and himself departed for home on the midnight train.

When this friend sought Dr. Ginger the next morning, he found him duly sober and ready to engage in the work proposed providing Mustard were employed also. As the condition suggested had not been anticipated by Mr. Travis, a telegram was sent to that gentleman and negotiations suspended until he should be heard from.

Whatever there may be to be said against Dr. Ginger, it must at least be admitted that he was loyal to his friend. The tie uniting the two men it would probably be difficult to ascertain. The one was educated, bright and full of humor; the other dull, reticent and at times morose. It may have been this diversity of talent and temperament which rendered association mutually agreeable; possibly the less versatile Mustard possessed the steadier nerve and cooler judgment which in all practical affairs made him the better and safer man. It is possible, also, that Ginger had been frequently indebted to his equally idle, but more prudent companion, for acts of rough personal kindness. It may be reasonably conjectured also, that by using Ginger when he was sober and caring for him when drunk, Mustard was enabled to obtain the money needed to keep body and soul together more easily than he could otherwise have done by any such individual effort as he was at all inclined to put forth. But let all this be as it may, the two men were firm

in their determination to remain together, and Mr. Travis, finding he could not secure the services of one without retaining the other, reluctantly concluded to employ both.

After the terms had been fully agreed upon, the tramps were supplied with respectable but not expensive apparel, and sent to Mr. Travis' town.

On the morning succeeding their arrival in Cranberry, those, prompted by curiosity or otherwise, to inspect the register of the village hotel, found inscribed thereon in the flowing and legible hand of Dr. Ginger the names of Colonel Arthur Albright and Mr. Charles Winship. Ginger was simply the professional appellation of the former, and Mustard and Pigstaff two of numerous aliases under which the latter had been cured a hundred times for the glorification of the ache annihilator, and the profit of its vendors.

Before the bell rang for supper half the people of the village had ascertained that two gentlemen of great distinction were domiciled at the Cranberry hotel, and before the evening was far spent it was noised abroad that they had come to work in the interest of the Greenback party, and that one of them, namely Colonel Arthur Albright, was especially severe in his denunciations of corporations, bond-holders, and what he termed the money power.

While the Colonel did not hesitate to affirm that both the old parties had been false to their promises, and unmindful of the people, he felt called upon as an honest citizen, to condemn with emphatic bitterness that party of organized robbers and confederated tyrants which had placed the detestable Alexander Hamilton Popper in nomination for Congress. What the country needed above all things in this period of business

depression, was more money. How in the name of common sense could the affairs of a great nation be carried on successfully upon the present volume of currency? Did anybody ever have too much money? No, the idea that there could be too much was preposterous. Congress should authorize the issue of a thousand million at its next session, and keep issuing. Then factories would start; furnaces would blaze; farm products would command reasonable prices. Then money shavers would not be gathering in ten per cent. Merchants would not be forced into bankruptcy; honest farmers would not be sold out by the sheriff; the rich would not be getting richer, and the poor poorer. But if men like Popper were elected, times would grow harder, wages lower and lower, until the wolf would be at every laboring man's door, and the wealth of the whole country seized by purse proud aristocrats. Are the people ready for this? *If not, vote against Popper.*

The Colonel did not assume to know anything definitely about Mr. Travis; he had been told, however, that he was an able lawyer and an honest man, and that he favored an expansion of the currency. If all this were true, he was infinitely preferable to Popper, who held that money might become too abundant. Too abundant! Are any of you afraid of getting too much? Have any of you got too much? If so, divide with your neighbor; pay off the mortgage on some poor man's house. Give some laboring man a holiday. Nonsense! There can not be too much money.

Colonel Albright's short exhortation in the office of the hotel was pretty generally approved by those who heard it. Mr. Calhoun Jones, growing enthusiastic, declared with profane emphasis that the argument was unanswerable. Our venerable friend, Dea-

con Gum, however, derived no pleasure from either the Colonel's speech or presence. He felt that he could not maintain himself creditably in a discussion with so ready and eloquent an opponent, and yet to sit quietly by and allow the utterances of a Greenbacker to go unchallenged might subject him to the charge of cowardice. His reputation as a leader demanded that he should at least demonstrate his capacity for leadership on this occasion by making prominent the principles of his own party. When introduced to the Colonel by the officious Jones, he therefore said:

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir, and hope to know you better. I trust you will pardon me for suggesting that in your discourse you have overlooked the most important issue, and the only one at all worthy of the consideration of a Christian people. I trust you will pardon me if I tell you——"

"Certainly, certainly, Deacon Gum," said the Colonel interrupting him, "certainly, my dear Deacon. This is a free country, sir, the land of free speech and free men." Thrusting his thumbs in the arm holes of his waist coat, the Colonel continued in a tone which utterly overwhelmed Ebenezer's piping voice. "Sir, I am pleased to meet a gentleman who stands up for his own convictions until by argument he is convinced they are unfounded. No, no, Brother Gum, satisfy me you are right and I shall follow you. I am neither too proud nor too obstinate to listen to the truth and be guided by it. I conclude, my dear sir, that you are a supporter of the detestable Popper, that you would contract the currency; that you would make it impossible for a poor man to live. Sir, I take it you believe in protecting corporations, bondholders, capital-

ists — the strong. Fellow citizens, it is the poor and weak who need protection. My dear Deacon, of all the parties on this green earth the one to which you belong——"

"Hold on, sir," screamed Ebenezer in desperation.

"——is the most corrupt. It has its viselike and cruel clutch on the throat of the poor. It is sweeping American vessels from the high seas. It is paralyzing all the diversified industries of a free people. It is——"

"I am not a Republican," shouted Gum at the top of his voice.

"Pardon me, Brother Gum," Albright continued in a still higher tone, "I am rejoiced to hear you say so. It affords me great satisfaction to know that if not an honest Greenbacker you are at least an intelligent Democrat, and I therefore, extend to you the right hand of ——"

"I am not, I am not," screamed Gum, "I am not——"

"Ah! my dear friend," continued the Colonel with swelling voice, "I see, I see; you belong to Victoria Woodhull's party. There's much in it; she is a great and good woman and a born leader. I can understand and appreciate, my worthy sir, the knightly sentiment which prompts you to rally to her standard. Your action does credit to your heart, though it may, in the judgment of the great mass, be disparaging to your intellect; but if the heart be right it matters little if the head be wrong. The motive is the test by which men should be judged. Ah! that lovely woman; she is the Joan D'Arc of politics. Sir, at any other crisis in the affairs of the Republic, I should join you and follow her, but until the country is supplied with a currency adequate to the demands of trade and poor

men's rights are recognized, I shall stand by the Greenback party, and yet I confess, my dear sir, the temptation to enlist under the banner of Victoria is almost irresistible."

Gum was intellectually overwhelmed; the Colonel roared at him with the lungs of Stentor. Neighbors were laughing heartily at his discomfiture. He stood no more chance of making himself heard than a penny whistle amid the clamor of a foghorn. Unable to endure his humiliation longer, he turned on his heel abruptly and left the room. Then the Colonel's admirers sent up a loud shout of victory, and the next day it was known all over the town of Cranberry that the Deacon had been completely pulverized in argument by the gallant Colonel. Thus it happened that within forty-eight hours after Albright's arrival, his name was on everybody's tongue, and many people were of the opinion that he was a greater statesman even than Mr. Travis.

VII

LILIAN MOORE

WHILE the young men of Cranberry gave Colonel Albright credit for great ability, and were pleased to associate with him, or receive even a nod in way of recognition as they passed him on the street, the young ladies of the town were looking modestly out of the corners of their bright eyes to catch a glimpse of the distinguished young statesman, and speculating as to whether he were still uncaptured, and hence a lawful prize for any one of them to seize upon and appropriate to domestic uses. When, therefore, on the pleasant Sabbath which succeeded his arrival, he lighted a cigar and left the hotel for a morning walk, it was generally known that he was abroad and many curtains were cautiously drawn aside by fair hands to enable marriageable heads to observe him as he passed, and form a hasty estimate of his true value as a lover and a family man. There were, doubtless, some sparkling eyes and fluttering hearts, for Colonel Albright was a straight stout handsome fellow whose head was in the air, and stride easy and graceful.

Turning to the right at the first crossing he proceeded leisurely along an avenue flanked on either hand by tasteful cottages until he reached the bridge which spans a little river; here he stopped and, leaning against the wooden railing, looked down upon the rippling current apparently absorbed in his own reflections. It is possible he was thinking soberly of wasted

opportunities and resolving that he would make another effort for a better life. No persons so think and resolve oftener than those whose thinking leads to no good results, and whose resolutions melt away under the fire of the first temptation.

Whatever the tendency of the Colonel's meditations may have been at first, it is quite certain they soon became quite cheerful, for he whistled the air of a lively song and then sang the words of it. The river marked the eastern boundary of the village, and beyond it was a narrow strip of bottom land on which sheep were grazing; still further away in the same direction were the higher grounds, with here and there a farm house visible. The Colonel finally turned to resume his walk and as he did so, found himself face to face with a young girl who carried a hymn book, and was evidently on her way to attend morning service. It may have been the quick blush mantling her face, or the cluster of fragrant rose buds at her throat, or the bright ribbons of her bonnet, or the delicate texture and tasteful fashion of her dress, which smote the Colonel's heart, confused his intellect, and made him forget his song, and for a moment, his surroundings, and even himself. It is quite certain, at any rate, that some one of these things, or all combined, had flashed upon him like a revelation and temporarily disturbed his mental equipoise. When the girl had passed quickly on toward the town and he finally recovered his five senses or so many of them as had been for the time lost or paralyzed, he reconsidered his resolution to explore the country beyond the river, and turning, followed her back to the village.

As they approached the church the throng of people all going in the same direction, became greater,

and taking advantage of this he was enabled to get quite near her, so near indeed, that they entered the vestibule together; but here she left him, and turning to the right ascended the stairway leading to the gallery of the choir.

For the first time in many years the Colonel found himself inside a house of worship. Taking a seat well forward and next to the wall, he sat quite erect with his face to the front for a few minutes, then turning suddenly to the gallery he saw the eyes of the woman of his heart fall quickly on the book before her, as if having permitted her thoughts to wander for a moment from her religious duties, she sought to get back to them as soon as possible. She was a lovely girl and the Colonel's active brain was busy building castles of which she either was or was to be the sole female tenant, or perhaps it would be safer to say the chief one, for it would be an inconsiderable castle, indeed, where ladies' maids, housekeepers and cooks could not be introduced to badger the mistress, and keep her duly alive to the fact that there was a better world for which she should not fail to make timely preparation.

The church was filling rapidly. Two well dressed young ladies and an elderly gentleman entered the pew, which the Colonel in part occupied, with so little ceremony as to suggest that it was intended for their exclusive use. A few minutes later a large ruddy-faced farmer stopped at the door of the seat immediately in front, while the members of his family filed into it in proper order. This was our friend Dundren with his wife and children and Gertrude Frazier. The Dundren pew being too small to accommodate comfortably all who sought admission to it, the elderly

gentleman invited the farmer to accept a seat with him, and this necessitated a shifting of the two young ladies to the right and so completely filled the space that the Colonel found it impossible to turn sufficiently to continue his observations of the gallery.

When the congregation rose to sing, the lady who stood by the Colonel's side, kindly offered him the use of one-half of her hymn book, a courtesy politely recognized and accepted.

The Colonel's character, as has been suggested, had its defects, but his voice had none. It was full of power, majesty and sweetness, and could rise and swell and ring out like the chimes of a cathedral, and then fall and soften and die away to the whispering murmurs of a harp. The choir might have sung that day as sweetly as it ever did before, but there was but one voice recognized, and when, at the conclusion of the service, the congregation filed out of the church, there was but one mentioned approvingly, and that was the voice of Colonel Albright, the great leader of the Greenback party.

The Colonel was in no haste to abandon the scene. of his triumph, and therefore lingered until the aisles ceased to be crowded by the outgoing congregation. When he left the church the people were in groups on the lawn exchanging friendly greetings, and as he was proceeding leisurely to the street, Mr. Travis called to him.

"Colonel Albright," said the lawyer, "allow me to introduce you to Mr. Dundren."

The two gentlemen shook hands, but before they had time to engage in conversation, Mrs. Dundren and the girl whom the Colonel had met at the bridge came up and were presented to him.

Mr. Travis had attached himself to Dundren on this occasion for the purpose of getting an opportunity to pay his respects to Gertrude Frazier. During the past two or three weeks he had been too much occupied by his political engagements to give proper attention to his social duties, and he now desired to assure her of this fact. He had perhaps no good reason for thinking she cared particularly whether he were present or absent; still she was an unmarried woman of good estate, who was not at all likely to go through life alone, and he knew of no one within the circle of their acquaintance who, in respect to wealth and distinction, was more likely to be acceptable to her than himself. Indeed, there were, so far as he could ascertain, no rivals in the field against him. Women at Gertrude's age are never demonstrative; they have the good sense to deport themselves like rational beings until a proposition is made, and then accept it without any ridiculous display of emotion. Passion is riotous, solicitous and indelicate; but love dignified, retiring, serene and reticent. He could not doubt that she would have the good sense to accept him, and he had concluded there would be no better time to make the offer than on the day succeeding his election. In the meantime she must not be permitted to attribute his prolonged absence during the campaign to any diminution of his regard for her.

He knew of Gertrude's engagement to Robert Brett, but that was an affair of ten years ago, and might be attributed to the indiscretion of youth. She had probably forgotten her old lover. He had certainly not been heard from since his departure, and would probably never be again. People of the neigh-

borhood in which he once lived had about ceased to speak of him. His sudden disappearance was, in Mr. Travis' opinion, very fortunate for Gertrude. She had probably long since made this discovery herself, and would doubtless now be pleased to form an alliance with one of equal wealth and congenial tastes.

The courtships of those advanced beyond the first strong impulses of youth are generally conducted with great deliberation. The boy of twenty and girl of seventeen reach a conclusion in six months, which the older couple may not arrive at in six years, and possibly not in sixteen. The latter have lived long enough to know that happiness does not always follow wedlock and they are therefore in no special haste.

Colonel Albright, through Mr. Travis' introduction, ascertained that the name of the red cheeked maiden whom he had met at the bridge was Lilian More, and subsequently learned that her widowed mother owned the handsome farm which lay just beyond the river. As he returned leisurely to the hotel it occurred to him that he had an interest in widow More's farm, and should at least make an effort to perfect his title to it. He was now on confidential relations with the candidate for Congress, on speaking terms with half the voters of the village, and known by reputation to all of them. It would therefore, be strange indeed if he should not be able to reach through this young girl's heart one of those soft places in life, which, according to his theory, belonged as rightfully to him as to anybody.

Strangers seen in the company of reputable people are, in villages and country neighborhoods at least, usually considered worthy of all confidence, and hence find little difficulty in obtaining admission to almost any

household. While Albright could probably not have gone alone to widow More's and secured an interview with the daughter, it was nevertheless easy enough on this pleasant Sunday to induce Mr. Calhoun Jones to join him in an after dinner stroll, and when they had crossed the river and ascended the hill beyond, to ask if he knew who lived in the handsome cottage they were approaching. Mr. Jones, of course, was well acquainted with the family, and would be pleased to call and introduce the Colonel, an act which any respectable villager might feel free to do, at any seasonable hour, for rural communities are not restrained in this regard by any formal and rigid code.

With true country cordiality the widow invited the young men to seats under a spreading maple, and requested Lilian to obtain a plate of apples for their refreshment.

"Lilly," she called out as the daughter was hurrying away, "be sure and get golden pippins, for they are mellower now than any others—and Lilly," the mother continued, as a new thought occurred to her, "fetch a bottle of cider, my dear, and then run to the cupboard and get a few doughnuts. The gentlemen must be hungry after their long walk."

"Not at all; not in the least, madam; don't put yourself or your daughter to any trouble, I beg of you," said the Colonel. "It is a delightful walk from the village to your place, madam. You have the advantage of both country and town; you are admirably situated."

Lilian soon re-appeared bearing a basket from which she took apples, cider and a tray heaped with twisted brown cakes, and placed them on a bench beside the visitors.

"I think you'll find the cider very good," said the widow, as she proceeded to fill the two glasses Lilian had been thoughtful enough to bring, "I got the recipe for preserving it from Massachusetts. My husband used to say it was the best in the whole country. Help yourselves, gentlemen. Here, Mr. Jones, you must try the cider, and Colonel, I want your opinion of it."

"It is excellent, madam," exclaimed the Colonel, when he had put it to his lips, "I never tasted better in my life. Rich, creamy, and such a splendid flavor. I rarely take champaign, but I certainly never partook of any so agreeable to my taste as this. Mr. Jones, don't you call it very good?"

"I do," replied Jones; "Mrs. More is famous throughout Cranberry County for the excellence of her cider. There can be no better."

"Doughnuts and cider go well together; take a doughnut, Colonel. Mr. Jones help yourself," said the widow, "I know you must be hungry. Lilly is always hungry as a wolf when she walks home from town."

"I don't wonder in the least," said the Colonel, looking up at the blushing girl; "I should be both hungry and thirsty so long as these cakes and this cider were within reach. I fear I should be eating and drinking all the time, madam."

Lilian's cheeks were glowing. Here was the distinguished and handsome gentleman who had almost run over her at the bridge; who had followed her to church, who had sung so delightfully, who had been introduced to her by the great Mr. Travis, and who was evidently the Prince for whose coming she had secretly looked and longed. Her little heart thumped wildly, her eyelashes were drooping, and she trembled slightly. The thought came into her young head that

doughnuts, cider and rough country entertainment might not be quite good enough for his royal highness, still she hoped from the bottom of her heart he would so far condescend as to enjoy them. What might he think of her? What a pity it was she had not on the nice lace collar and lovely brooch her mother had given her on her seventeenth birthday, not yet a month gone. He would surely think her awkward, and may be her hair was in disorder and she looking like a fright; but how easy and self-possessed he was!

In less than fifteen minutes the Colonel was as well acquainted with the simple-hearted widow as if he had known her always. In half an hour he was addressing the handsome daughter as Lilian, and they were singing a hymn together much to the delight of the mother, and the apparent satisfaction of Mr. Jones. In less than an hour after his arrival he had obtained permission to escort the daughter to church in the evening.

Ah! what an elegant and accomplished gentleman he was, and how much superior to Jack Wharton, who would come sauntering down the road on summer afternoons casting sheep's eyes over the fence at Lilian, but too bashful to speak out plumply and tell what he meant by such foolishness. Jack would be dazed when he saw her going to church in the gray of the evening leaning confidingly on the arm of the Prince. But she could not help it; Jack might be a good fellow enough in his way, but he lacked blood and culture. In brief, he was not a prince. He was simply the over-grown, awkward son of a well to do farmer who would be pleased to have the line fence between the Wharton and More farms abolished by the marriage of Jack and Lilian, so the youngsters might have the run of six

hundred and forty acres together instead of being restricted to three hundred and twenty each. But now that the Prince had come the division fence was not only likely to be renewed many times but to be built several rails higher than it had ever been, and then staked and ridered, so a two-year old colt could not touch the top of it with his nose.

It may seem incredible to some few persons of antiquated ways and exclusive dispositions, that the Colonel should have succeeded in his purpose thus far so easily, but it is nevertheless true. There are few if any guards thrown about young girls in country and village or even city. Their own inclinations are, as a rule, their only guide. Fathers and mothers rarely stop to scrutinize closely a well dressed young man who comes to them in fairly good company. If the father were buying a horse he would be careful to ascertain its pedigree and to know the animal was neither vicious in temper nor defective in limb. If the mother were selecting cloth for a garment, she would inquire particularly as to the reliability of its color and durability of its fibre; but when a young man comes to bear the daughter company in her own home, or in her walks and drives, no care is exercised and no advice given. In the selection of a husband she is allowed greater freedom than would be accorded to her in the purchase of a dress, or in the transaction of any other business, however trivial and unimportant.

VIII

'SQUIRE JABEZ WHARTON

LATE in the afternoon of this pleasant Sabbath, a tall, awkward country bred youth, attired in his Sunday clothes, was standing on the bridge with his back against its railing, and his head bowed in deep meditation. It was Jack Wharton. He thought possibly Lilian would venture out to the evening service alone, and that he might join her at this point. He had known her from childhood and at one time felt easy and unembarrassed in her presence; but within the past year or two she had taken on very quickly the appearance and manners of a handsome young lady, and was in fact so bewitching, and seemed so absolutely perfect that Jack was puzzled to account for the sudden change, and fearful she had grown altogether beyond his reach. He did not dare to go boldly to her mother's house, for this would have disclosed the bashful fellow's purpose, and might have been met by a rebuff humiliating to him and the subject of amusement to others. To avoid the dangers incident to a direct attack, he had therefore, concluded if possible to meet Lilian as if by accident, and in the conversation which would naturally follow, endeavor as cunningly as possible to draw from her in words or hints, permission to attend her to church, and then escort her home. While Jack was thinking the matter over and watching eagerly for a silver gray dress trimmed with bright ribbons to appear on the brow of the hill to the east

of him, he heard the steps of one coming from the opposite direction, and turning his head saw a gentleman approaching who was evidently satisfied with himself and fairly content with the world at large.

"Hello, my man," the stranger exclaimed when he reached the bridge, "I can guess your thoughts; your face is like an open book to me."

"Sir?" stammered Jack, blushing to the roots of his hair.

"My good fellow," continued the stranger as he paused for a moment to look down on the river, "you have been reminded by the running water, of the stream of life which never ceases in its flow. Now creeping on amid mud and moss and quicksands, now dashing against rocks, now leaping over precipices, then broadening and deepening and pouring out its waters into the boundless and fathomless sea. Such reflections will do you no harm, sir. Good evening."

"Good evening, sir," responded Jack respectfully.

His eyes followed the stranger up the hill, and when he saw him enter Mrs. More's gate he would have given a fine Durham calf to know who the eloquent gentleman was, and just why he called at the home of Lilian. Had a new preacher come to town? He talked very much like a clergyman; his voice was strong and solemn, and his theme a sober one. Jack had heard the stream of life touched upon before, and never, he thought, more impressively. Had Mrs. More any rich kinfolks that might come to visit her? Not that Jack knew of. He had lived neighbor to the Mores all his life — for twenty years, in fact, and never heard them speak of rich relations, a matter people rarely fail to mention if they can do so truthfully.

While Jack was puzzling his brain over this

stranger, and his mysterious mission to widow More's, he saw him and Lilian descending the hill together, and then the young man's heart quaked and his knees trembled, for he knew at once the gentleman was from some far city, and had found out how beautiful Lilian was, and had come perhaps a thousand miles to marry her. Jack did not care what personal misfortunes befell him now. If the war were not ended, he would go into the army to-morrow, and if possible get killed in the first battle. Perhaps after he was dead she would think of the boy with whom she used to romp as if she were the commonest kind of a girl and not at all proud and thoughtful of her looks, but — well, he must get away for they were now crossing the little stretch of bottom ground which lay between the hill and river. Going hastily to the village end of the bridge he jumped from it to the pebbly margin below and walked down the stream until it turned westward round a point of elevated ground where as he could not be seen from the road, he threw himself on the green sward to consider further whether he might not just as well be dead as alive.

It required a longer time to discuss this question than might be supposed by those who have never given it special attention, and before the controversy ended the crimson faded from the western sky; one by one the stars came out; the sound of the rippling water became more distinct; the scattered trees in the fields and on the river bank grew to be shadows. Then the east began to brighten, and the moon pushed a silvery thread above the horizon which grew until a burnished shield seemed to stand upright on the land. Then as full rounded it crept slowly up the sky, the stars waxed dim around it; a soft light fell on the fields and bright-

ened the little river, and mingled with shadows of tree and shrub. Jack finally awoke to this more cheerful change in the scene around him, and began to have some dim perception of the vastness of the universe, and the grandeur and beauty of it, and of the littleness of himself, and the insignificance of his own griefs. Springing to his feet he said, solemnly, he would be a man henceforth, and not nurse his troubles. There were as good fish in the sea as any that had been caught, and with this homely and wholesome maxim stirring in his brain, but a heaviness still pressing on his heart, he followed the winding river back to the bridge, and was about to climb up into the roadway when his ear caught the sound of voices. Still not wishing to be seen by Lilian and the stranger, and quite sure the voices he heard were theirs, he stepped into the shadow of a stone abutment to remain until they should pass by.

Lilian's companion was in no haste. Under the mellow light of a full moon, widow More's bottom land, sloping fields and cottage, further up, looked like a paradise, while Lilian herself was an houri, or whatever else it is which men deem a fit occupant of such a place. He therefore, stopped when he reached the center of the bridge to enjoy the beauty of the moonlit scene, and possibly to spend a half hour in delicious communion with the girl herself whose innocence and beauty had by this time won upon him almost as much as the broadness and value of her mother's acres, and the comfort and unostentatious elegance of her house.

"My dearest Lilian—" Jack heard the stranger say in tender tones.

"You must not speak to me any more in that

way," said the girl quickly, with tremulous voice; "we have known each other but a day. Let us walk on."

Lilian was trembling with excitement, yet feeling greatly flattered by the Colonel's avowal of his love. There was, however, something in his manner and plainness of speech which seemed to her unnatural and indelicate, if not wholly wrong. The instincts of true womanhood were strong within her, and the tender words which had fallen on her ears so frequently to-night, though sincere enough perhaps, were not in harmony with her notions of propriety. There might be such a thing as love at first sight — indeed of this there could be no question, but it seemed to her this love — all love in fact — was shy, silent and retiring; feeling its way modestly with looks, half words, hints, whisperings, and inferences, and not obtrusively, with bold strides and high sounding sentences. And yet he must be right — certainly more likely to be right than an inexperienced girl, for was not he a wise and handsome gentleman who had, doubtless, moved in the best society, and therefore, familiar with all its habits, and observant of them?

"Dearest," the Colonel replied, as he took the girl's hand in his own, "it is not late; let us not be in haste. There never was a more beautiful night than this, and never a lovelier woman to look upon it than you. This is one of the precious and delightful moments which come so rarely in life we can not afford to turn our backs upon them. To do so would be shutting our eyes to the glories of nature and flying from the good things created for our enjoyment. Indeed it would be rejecting the overflowing goblet presented to our lips by heaven itself. No, no, my darling, let us

not be ungrateful. Let us accept nature's choicest offerings with thanks and be happy while we may."

Her hands were lying passively in his; her heart throbbing as if it would break away, and her face flushed to the color of a red rose. She tried to speak, then staggered forward as if resolved to go on in spite of him, but some impulse drew her back and looking up into his face she managed to articulate brokenly:

"It is — still a long way; let us go on."

"Only a step, my darling — if it were twenty miles, the distance would seem short. I trust you have not grown weary of —"

There was a heavy footfall on the village end of the bridge now. The girl turned her face hurriedly in that direction with an expression of relief upon it. The next moment a rough voice called out:

"Good evenin'; a nice night;" and then as the man came nearer he exclaimed:

"Hey! Lilly, is't you, gal?"

"Colonel Albright, 'Squire Jabez Wharton," said Lilian excitedly.

"Right glad to know ye, sir," said the 'Squire heartily, as he reached out his big, hard right hand and grasped the Colonel's. "Howdy-do, sir. How's all your folks, sir?"

"Well, quite well, thank you," responded the Colonel coolly.

"That's good; nothing like health, sir. Stranger in these parts, I reckon; where'd ye come from, sir, if I may make so bold as to ast?"

The 'Squire, a tall, gaunt, bony man, stood facing the Colonel. The girl had fallen back a step and leaning against the railing of the bridge was apparently looking at some distant object down the river.

"I have been here but a few days," the Colonel said abstractedly, endeavoring to devise some pretext for getting rid of the 'Squire, who acted as if he intended, in neighborly fashion, to walk the remainder of the way to Mrs. More's with them. "I trust I shall see you again, my dear sir, and have an opportunity to give you all the details of my personal history. At this late hour it would be cruel to detain you from your family for such a purpose. I wish you a pleasant good night, sir."

The Colonel bowed as if he were taking leave of the 'Squire, but the latter not profiting by the hint, drew a plug of tobacco from his pocket and biting off a chew, said:

"If ye'r goin' on to Widder More's, I'll keep ye company. It's on my way; I live at the house beyond. Air ye a sellin' of lightning rods in these parts, sir? The men as sells 'em air generally smart, dressy fellers, with a flowin' gift of gab."

"No," replied the Colonel stiffly, but without moving forward, "and if I were, I should not try to sell a rod to you."

"Well now, that's kinder funny," said the 'Squire, with a puzzled look; "most of them lightnin' rod fellers strike me fust. An' ye would n't sell me one? Why not, if I may make bold to ast?"

The Colonel now a little angry replied, with some show of feeling:

"My good sir, lightning will never hurt you. Your head is as invulnerable as a cannon ball. You need have no fear of lightning. Good-night, sir."

"'Tis a good night," said the 'Squire, looking about him observantly, "mighty nice. It's a dry moon,

Colonel; leastwise it was when new accordin' to the Injun sign, which I reckon is as good as any."

Lilian possessed a thorough understanding of 'Squire Jabez Wharton's adhesive qualities, and possibly was not altogether displeased with the prospect of having his company for the remainder of the way. The Colonel had advanced with astonishing celerity to a point ordinarily requiring years to reach. She feared if again alone with him under the stimulating influence of the moonlight, questions might be asked which she was not at this time fully prepared to answer, and pledges required which she was certainly on this night not ready to give, and so she said as calmly as she could:

"Colonel Albright, let us walk on with 'Squire Wharton. I fear it may be getting late."

"Certainly, certainly, Miss More," said the Colonel, offering her his arm, "but I think it is still early. 'Squire Wharton, my honored sir, let us move forward. You are quite correct in affirming this is a lovely night. I conclude from your appreciation of it and your appearance, sir, that you are of an ethereal and poetic nature, and if called upon could sing a sentimental song with such sweetness as to make the very dogs howl with joy."

"No, I don't sing," said the 'Squire, as they walked on together. "I could a larnt, but it 'peared to me kind of triflin' business fer a man, sort er wimens' work like, an' I never tried. Ye'r fine langwidge, Colonel, minds me of a book agent — air ye a book agent, sir?"

"No, I have not yet attained to that honor. I may by great industry reach it in time, but as yet I am pursuing an humbler walk in life."

"Well, as I was 'bout to say. This book agent come to my house a year ago last grass, with a univarsial history. He was a pious chap, an' talked purty, an' tole me how valerable the book was, an' how useful in a family, an' how we ought to have a univarsial history so as whenever a furrin country was spoke of we mought turn to it an' see what sort of people lived there, an' what they'd done an' all that; an' he said as how the book'd be valerable to Jack who was growin' up into a man, and mought be President of these United States, may be, if we'd give the boy a fair shake; and so fer Jack's sake in part, an' to help a pious an' worthy book agent in part, I bought the book and paid him fer it, an' put it on the sittin' room table, an' give the man his dinner. Well now ye'll be surprised to know that that air chap was a blamed fraud — a doggoned cheat. The next year — not mor'n a month ago, he come round agin, drat him! sellin' of a book 'titled the Treasury of Historical Facts, an' as he was sort of a ole acquaintance, an' as I'd got in the way of buyin' books, havin' bought one already, an' as he seemed to be a likely sort of a man an' ast a blessin' at dinner, an' talked about the power of knowledge, an' how much more valerable it was than money, an' how boys had got to be rich an' famous by knowin' things, why I up an' bought the Treasury of Historical Facts, an' paid him fer it, an' laid it on the sittin' room table side of the Univarsial History, an' I'll be blowed if when Jack come home an' looked at the new book he didn't laugh fit to kill himself. Thinkin' that Jack was tickled because I bought him a new book, an' feelin' purty good myself over doin' a good thing fer Jack, I says, says I, 'Jack, what air ye laughing at, my boy?' An' says he, 'Because

you've been all-firedly took in father,' says he; and says I, growin' purty hot, 'What's yer meanin?' says I. An' says he, 'the old book an' the new one is just the same,' says he, 'ceptin' the title page,' says he, 'The Univarsal History and the Treasury of Historical Facts is the same book,' says Jack; an' then I says to Jack, says I, 'that air book agent must be a durned, doggoned fraud,' says I. Well, sir, yer flowery langwidge an' perlite ways made me think of him, an' I didn't know at fust but ye was the same individgel."

" 'Squire Wharton, you are a flatterer. If I were in the least vain you would spoil me; but I am not. Accept my thanks for this interesting incident of your personal history, and be assured, sir, that I am proud to know a gentleman who has thus laid the foundation of an extensive and valuable library."

"I'll never buy a nuther book, never," said the 'Squire emphatically. "But speaking of the book man makes me think of a nuther durned rascal what come ter my house not more'n two months ago an' wanted me to sarve as gineral agent fer a patent hoss rake. The rake, 'cordin' to his tell would a most go itself into the field, rake up the hay and' carry it to the stack. All 't needed was a hoss an' a small boy to go 'long of it to see the work was done punctual an' regular. There was five dollars clean profit in a sellin' of each rake; an' the man calkerlated that at a low calkerlation I could sell fifty if I was right lively at the business, which he knowed by my gineral reputation I would be. Well, the clean profit on fifty at a gain of five dollars a piece would be two hundred an' fifty dollars you see, an' I knowed sich a rake 'ud go off like hot cakes of a cold mornin', an' as I hadn't to pay fer 'em till they was sold an' the money cur-

lected, I took the gineral agency, an' signed an order on the head shop where the rakes was made. Now what d'ye think? Guess if you can what sort of a doggoned trick that air blasted slick tongued chap played onto me."

"My dear 'Squire, I cannot. The very suggestion that there was a trick in a transaction so open and apparently fair has paralyzed my intellect; but if in my enfeebled condition I were compelled to answer your very pertinent inquiry, I should say the fifty hoss rakes came marching up to your residence in platoons, headed by a drum major and a brass band, and you welcomed them with a speech, and tapped a barrel of apple jack in honor of their arrival, and then they all became exceedingly merry, and began to kick around over the pasture fields and rake in the horses, cows and sheep. Have I hit the mark?"

"Not by a long shot!" replied the 'Squire, emphatically; "that doggoned chap by some hocus pocus changed the order fer fifty hoss rakes into a note fer five hundred dollars, an' then sold the note, an' that air note is over to the Cranberry Bank for curlection, but I won't pay it. They're a passel of cheats. I'll see the hull caboodle of 'em — bank an' all, in Halifax fust."

" 'Squire, 'Squire, this is strong language for a Sabbath night."

"Ast ye'r pardon, but it was a durnation swindle. I only agreed to sarve as gineral agent for the hoss rakes——"

"You would have made them an able representative, 'Squire. They would have had good reason to be proud of you, my worthy sir."

"D'ye think they can hold me on that air note?"

"The hoss rakes?"

"No, them bank folks."

"If they felt as I do, sir, they would let you go — they would certainly not seek to hold you for an instant; they would say, go my friend in peace."

"Well, I b'lieve they'll have to when they know the facts. But atween book agents, and lightnin' rod men, and sewin' machine peddlers, and sellers of hoss rakes, and Hebrew Jews with packs, an' root and yarb doctors, there's no more livin' in this world with any satisfaction. It wasn't so when I was a boy; people was honest then. Ye never heard of swindlin' in them times. Ye didn't have to lock yer houses an' barns and' cribs. But it ain't so any more. The hull country is full of scamps. It was only yesterday week that a durnation, slick-tongued yarb doctor come to my house when I was ter work in the pertater patch, an' made Nancy Ann, my wife, b'lieve a common bile which she had on to the back of her neck was a cancer an' she paid him four dollars fer medicine to draw it out by the roots. What's the durned country a comin' to any how? Ye can't tell who to trust; the slickest and piousest fellers air the biggest scamps. Now there was that air doggoned Hebrew Jew, from Jerusalem —"

They had by this time reached the brow of the hill, and as the Colonel and Lilian were about to turn from the road to enter Mrs. More's gate, the former, stopping, shook hands cordially with 'Squire Wharton, expressed the pleasure he felt at having made his acquaintance, and bade him good-bye.

But the 'Squire was in no haste; he had not yet fairly begun the story about the Hebrew Jew from

Jerusalem, and while he undoubtedly appreciated the self-denying spirit of the Colonel which could consent cheerfully to relinquish a great pleasure rather than weary a friend at this late hour of the evening, he did not propose to take advantage of it. And so walking with him to the gate, he said:

"Go into the house, Lilly; the night air, if ye stand in it is cold' an' mought give ye a cough, gal. I want to tell the gentleman how that doggoned Hebrew Jew from Jerusalem——"

Lilian had not only heard the story many times, but she was quite sure from her knowledge of the 'Squire's staying qualities that he would not leave so long as the Colonel remained; she therefore, gladly enough perhaps, turned to the latter, gave him her hand for an instant, bade him good-night, and hurried into the house.

"This Hebrew Jew, as I was goin' to tell ye 'bout," said the 'Squire, deliberately, as he leaned against the fence and took a fresh chew of tobacco, "this here durned Hebrew Jew——"

"Damn the Hebrew Jew," exclaimed the Colonel, angrily, as the door closed behind Lilian. "Sir, do you know — have you the slightest conception of what a bore is?"

"I hev the finest boar in Cranberry County, sir," returned the 'Squire proudly, "a full blood Chester white; air ye interested in fine hogs?"

"No — damn fine hogs — all hogs; they annoy me."

"The Chesters air gentle, but some breeds air cross. Now there's Neighbor Jones' black——"

"'Squire Wharton, in bidding you a friendly good-night, allow me to congratulate you, sir, on

being a gentleman of greater boring capacity than any other man it has ever been my good fortune to meet. Your powers of adhesion and penetration are simply marvelous. You should have been a pump-maker, sir; you carry an adjustable augur which may be used to drive a hole of any size and length desired. Did you ever try your hand at pump-making, sir?"

"No, but I've often thought I could hev found a easier business than farming; somethin' that 'ud a took less hard liftin' an' more head work; but as I was 'bout tellin' of ye when ye ast, 'bout the hogs, that air Hebrew Jew from Jerusalem—"

"May go to Jericho," said the Colonel, turning on his heel and walking rapidly away.

The 'Squire with his back against the fence and his hands in his pockets, stood watching the Colonel's lessening figure until it reached the bottom of the hill; then with a feeling of surprise that any sensible man should voluntarily turn away from so interesting a story as he had to tell about the Jew, he started for his own home.

IX

BEN HOOD

IT was now the middle of September. The election would occur on the second Tuesday of October; there was less than a month left in which to make preparation for the final struggle at the polls. Travis and Popper were exceedingly busy and their respective committees no less active. Political documents were being distributed freely. Men were going from house to house to ascertain the names of voters and their party preferences. Lists of the doubtful and undecided were being prepared with a view to bringing proper or improper influences to bear on them. Mass meetings were held at the county seats, and young lawyers who had few opportunities to display their eloquence in the line of their profession were driving to remote townships with the hope of winning fame for themselves and votes for their candidates, by addressing little audiences in school-houses.

The most active man, apparently, at this stage of the canvass, was our esteemed fellow citizen, Deacon Ebenezer Gum. He and his sleek, mouse-colored mare were on the road almost constantly. The general public believed he was industriously engaged in getting the moral and religious element in battle array with a view to making a tremendous assault upon the strongholds of the ungodly. Mr. Travis thought he was endeavoring to convince the Prohibitionists that inasmuch as there was no possibility of electing a man

of their own selection, it would be well to cast their ballots for the Democratic candidate. Mr. Popper, on the other hand, had confidential assurances that the reformers were pleased with his sober habits, and temperate inclinations, and would give him their hearty support. Deacon Gum's mouse-colored mare knew as much with respect to the acts and intentions of her master as either Travis, Popper, or the public. Ebenezer did not care a copper farthing how the election resulted. It was his business to play between the two candidates and if possible satisfy both. In doing this, however, he must not neglect to cultivate the members of his own party, and obtain dinners, horse feeds, and lodgings without cost. In order to subserve the important ends suggested, the Deacon took frequent counsel with brothers and sisters in respect to the wickedness of the world and the measures requisite for its speedy regeneration.

To-day he was on the war-path, and the tail of his sleek mare was turned toward Cranberry town. After riding for an hour or two at a good round trot, he entered a forest whose overshadowing lines stretched for some distance along the road. It may be the Deacon suspected his foes had prepared an ambuscade for him in this secluded spot, and it may be he thought there were wild beasts in the wood of which a prudent man should be wary; but as to the operations of his mind and the motives controlling his action on this occasion we can only indulge in vague and unprofitable speculation. What he did outwardly and in the flesh, however, may be recorded with the utmost accuracy. He brought the mare to a full stop, then turned as a vigilant sentinel might do in an enemy's country to see that nobody was following him. Ascer-

taining thus that he was alone and unobserved, his right hand unconsciously sought an inside pocket, drew therefrom a flat bottle and applied it to his lips. For the space of a minute there was a gurgling sound such as might emanate from the human throat when being thoroughly irrigated. This strange maneuvre fully completed, and the flask carefully replaced in the recesses of the under garment, Ebenezer seemed to adopt a more cheerful view of life, and to be ready for any stratagem or secret and damnable plot which his adversaries might have prepared for his reception. Indeed so reckless of his own personal safety did he become, that he abandoned all thought of precautionary measures, urged his mare to a gallop; and, boldly lifting up his voice, sang a negro melody which he had learned in the days of his youth when he was an apprentice at the bench of the village shoemaker, and still wedded to the beggarly elements of the world.

After passing the strip of woodland, he entered upon a broad area of open rolling country, having well cultivated fields and all the indications of an old settlement and a thrifty people. Here, abandoning the negro melody, he relapsed into silence and possibly became absorbed in serious meditation, for he assumed immediately that more orderly and dignified bearing which to the popular mind is indicative of personal sanctity.

The sun had by this time reached the meridian, and as the Deacon was approaching and passing farm houses, he looked about him sharply as if in quest of something or somebody he was eager to find. Pretty soon he saw a farmer just ahead of him near a comfortable residence, with two horses in his charge which were drinking at a stone trough by the road side. In-

creasing the speed of the mare somewhat, in order to reach the place before the farmer should leave it, the Deacon, when quite near, called out in the cordial tones of an intimate friend:

"Good morning, Carter. How are you?"

"Tolerable well," the young farmer replied, looking up as if surprised by the salutation and interrogatory. "You hev the advantage of me, sir."

"Gum — Deacon Ebenezer Gum, of Cranberry."

"O yes, I've heerd tell of you; how's all yer folks, Deacon?"

"Well, right well, thank you. Anything new or strange in the neighborhood?"

"Nothin' partic'lar; 'bout the same ole story. What's going on in Cranberry, Deacon? You folks as live in town an' near the telegraph oughter know most everything."

"Everybody is thinking about the election," replied Gum, throwing the bridle rein on the mare's neck so she could get her nose to the water trough. "It's getting pretty hot. Travis is going night and day, and Popper is close on his heels — maybe he's ahead; nobody can tell exactly, for it's a tight race, nip and tuck, I think; but if I had my way, Carter, I'd beat them both. The old parties are getting too corrupt — no honesty in them, not a bit. They're a godless set, and haven't a principle to brag about, Carter, as sure as you live — not one."

"'Cordin' to your say they hevn't, Deacon," replied the young man firmly, "but no man can hev all the say in this country, an' I think my party's a purty good one; leastwise I'm goin' to stand up for it all the time. My dad an' ole grandad an' the Carter fambly hev allers been great for Gineral Jackson, an'

we ain't goin' back on his principles now. We don't turn our coats like some folks. We're stickers, sir, that's what the Carters is — stickers. I've hearn tell how ole grandad uster say he'd stick to Gineral Jackson an' his principles ontil there wasn't nary button onto his coat, an' I'm a chip of the old block, Deacon. We're stickers and allers vote the straight ticket, rain or shine."

"Well, I must confess," the Deacon said softly as he threw his left leg over the neck of the mare, "I admire your spunk, Carter, and your consistency. The Carters were always spunky and consistent. No man could ever budge them an inch. When they put a foot down, there it staid. You always knew exactly where to find them — always. If they said they'd vote for a man a hurricane couldn't keep them away from the polls. I like that sort of metal in men. It's the true grit. They may get wrong now and then, but they're always honest, consistent, reliable, and generally right. I knew your father, 'Squire Jonas Carter, very well. He was a sensible, clever man — mighty hospitable and clever——"

"That he was — that he was, Deacon," broke in the farmer, "there was no better man in this here section than dad, if I do say it myself."

"Not one, sir — not one better in all Cranberry county, than 'Squire Jonas Carter. I have taken many a good dinner in his house — in the old house which stood where that one does. We didn't agree in politics, but were always the best of friends. Politics 's one thing, friendship's another. I never mix them; 'Squire Carter didn't. Many's the time when as I came riding by on my way to Rudd's Corners the 'Squire would call out in his frank cordial way, 'Hey,

Gum, are you going by without stopping to swap lies with a fellow?' and then I'd have to get off, put my horse in the stable, and stay to dinner. That's the kind of man your sainted father was, Carter. I always feel like shedding tears when I think of his hospitable ways, and remember that he's gone. I know it's weak and foolish, but I can't help it; we was such intimate friends, and Ah! he's gone to that bourne, as the Psalmist says——"

"Deacon, git right offen the mare and let me lead her to the stable. It's about dinner time; I just come in from ploughin' a field of oat stubble to git dinner myself. Here, I'll take the mare; you push along into the house an' make yerself to home. We don't put on no style to our house, neither do we put on any mortgages — that's one of dad's sayin's, but we allers hev enough to eat, sich as it is, an' our friends is welcome."

"I didn't think of stopping to dinner," protested the Deacon, as he dismounted, "I expected to reach the corners —"

"You go right to the house, Deacon, I'll 'tend to the mare long of my horses."

Carter put the rein of the mare's bridle over his arm, and started with the three horses to the barn. Then as a new thought occurred to him, he called back:

"Corn or oats, Deacon?"

"Six quarts of oats."

The dinner to which the wife of an American farmer invites her guests, whether their presence be premeditated or accidental, is with respect to the number and character of the dishes one of the marvels of the age. Certainly no table in any other section of the world presents in abundance such an endless variety

of edibles, and probably few hard working statesmen ever sat down to a good dinner with less reluctance than Brother Gum, or ate with a greater desire to do justice to the hospitality of the host.

The young wife with her cheeks flushed at the kitchen fire, and the young husband with his face all aglow with the sunshine of the fields, felt that the Deacon's brief but solemn blessing at the beginning of the meal in some way purified and enriched their home, by bringing it in direct communication with the good Father of all to whom they were so much indebted and perhaps ungrateful. Good words, let them come whence they may, sink deep into soft, honest hearts, suggesting nobler thoughts, strengthening good resolutions, and encouraging men to live better lives. The thief's money in the hands of one who believes it was come by honestly, is as good as any; so of the hypocrite's prayers and blessings, they are to the innocent, trusting, reverential hearer, pure gold with the impress of God upon them.

After the dinner was over the young mother took her first born from the cradle where it had been sleeping, and held it up proudly for the Deacon's admiration.

"Is it going to be a voter?" he asked, chucking the babe under the fat, dimpled chin?

"Oh, yes, yes," she answered with a laugh.

"He's goin' to vote the ole ticket, Deacon," said the father, stretching out his arms to take the babe; "he's a sticker, an'll vote straight; there'll be no nonsense about this chap; not any!"

"Hope he'll be for temperance, Carter, and vote the Prohibition ticket, and against the rum sellers. It

would be a pity to have so fine a boy go wrong; it would indeed."

"Yes, he must be temperate — he will be," said the mother, quickly, as if alarmed by the Deacon's suggestion.

"He'll be all right,' said the father, trotting the boy gently on his knee; "if he don't drink no more nor his dad and grandad. Whiskey never hurt our fambly, Deacon. It's the idle, shiftless fellers as gits hurt by whiskey, an' they're bound to git hurt some how. Dad uster say there was more roads nor one to go to the bad, and if you fence one on em up they'll take a nuther. A jumpin' hoss don't stay in the field because one gap is shet; he's bound to git out any how, an' the higher you build the fence the higher he'll jump. It's in the critter, Deacon."

"But if there was no temptation on the outside the horse wouldn't jump; abolish the temptation, Carter,— shut up the rum shops. The Lord said lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. He was wiser than man."

This silenced Carter. He took it for granted the Lord meant precisely what Deacon Gum meant; and although not a professing Christian he nevertheless believed in the Lord and the truths of the Bible, and would not argue against what Deacon Gum seemed to think was the Divine will; and yet it still appeared to him that the fault was in the critter — that the critter did not stop to consider before jumping whether the grass was long or short on the outside, but jumped to gratify a spirit of restlessness, the outgrowth possibly of early indulgence, bad example, lack of discipline, or an innate tendency to evil.

Bidding the Carters good-day, Deacon Gum re-

sumed his journey, and had trotted along for an hour or more on his way to Rudd's corners, when the light clouds of the morning grew suddenly dark, and threatened to let down a plentiful shower. Soon large drops falling here and there on the dusty road, admonished him that if he would escape a thorough drenching, he must seek shelter in the first house he came to. Urging the mare now to a gallop he went dashing along in fine style until he reached a private avenue leading up a gentle slope between two rows of maples to an old-fashioned but substantial farm house. Wheeling to the right he gave the mare another stroke of the whip to remind her there was no time to lose, and she fairly flew up the lane, past the house, and to the cattle sheds which adjoined the barns and stables in the rear. It was a narrow escape. Before the Deacon had time to dismount the rain fell in torrents and the noise of it on the roofs about him was like the roar of the sea.

The Deacon would not, under ordinary circumstances, have sought shelter here. The man who owned the place, though hospitable always, and gentle enough at times, frequently made himself exceedingly disagreeable in the discussion of political subjects. He was known throughout Cranberry County, and even beyond its boundaries as an off ox, who took delight in pulling against the team. This was especially true of him in periods of great political excitement; he then lost apparently all discretion and gave expression to sentiments which the great majority of his neighbors heartily condemned. He was at this very time imprudent enough to affirm that Travis, the Democratic leader, was a scoundrel; Popper, the Republican candidate, a cowardly trimmer; Gum, the leader of the Prohibitionists, a shallow hypocrite, and John Rudd, the

local champion of the Greenbackers, a common thief who sought to pay his debts in rags.

Forty years ago when Ben Hood, the father, was alive, the large brick with its porches and leantos, where Ben Hood, the son now lived, and in whose ample cattle shed Deacon Gum found shelter, was known far and wide as a station of the under ground railroad. Just how many fleeing fugitives had been secretly harbored in the cellars, garrets and closets of the old house nobody now living knew exactly. But many and many a man of Cranberry County had heard his father denounce Ben Hood the elder, for sheltering runaway negroes, and helping them on their way to Canada. Indeed, there had been in the old time mysterious covered wagons going up the lane and coming out of it, at all hours of the night and in all kinds of weather. It was even said that the elder Hood kept a posse of slave hunters, who pounced down upon his house after midnight, at bay for two solid hours, and when the fight was over and a half dozen heads bruised, justified his action by the pretense that he mistook them for robbers. After they had ransacked the premises and found nothing, he invited them to the dining room, gave them a royal lunch, and laughed and joked as if he regarded their coming as a great compliment to his personal worth. Before he would let them go, he even ordered in a big bellied brown jug, bade them help themselves, and, with the crown of his head six feet four inches above the soles of his boots, he lifted his glass still higher, and cried:

"Here's good luck and long life to the poor devil you're after."

By this time it was three o'clock in the morning, and Ben Hood, the son, a lively boy of his age,

mounted on a stout horse, with a negro behind him, was twenty miles further north than he had been three hours before when the slave hunters began to rattle at his father's door.

The present Ben Hood, nearly six feet five inches in height, broad shouldered and full chested, was a chip of the old block, or rather a duplication of it. He had been among the first to enlist as a private soldier in '61; had gone through Bull Run and several of the earlier battles of the war without a scratch; but subsequently, losing an arm at Gettysburg, he was considered unfit for further service and sent home. So long as the war continued he was enthusiastic in support of it, and during this time enjoyed some degree of popular favor. But after the war closed and slavery was abolished, he gradually lost all interest in existing parties, and finally absented himself from the polls entirely, assigning as a reason therefor that elections presented nothing but an opportunity to choose between evils.

To Deacon Gum, who knew Hood well, his habit of direct and emphatic speech was particularly annoying; and yet he thought it better to run the risk of being subjected to it, than to receive a thorough wetting. When he shot past the house to the stables he was not unobserved. After the first fury of the storm had passed, Hood put on a rubber coat, and taking an umbrella, went out to invite him to more comfortable quarters. The Deacon was in the act of reviving his drooping spirits by a vigorous pull at the flat bottle when Hood, coming suddenly round the corner of the shed, saluted him in lusty tones:

"Hello, Deacon, I should suppose there was water

enough to-day to make it unnecessary to resort to other fluids. How are you, my venerable fraud?"

Ebenezer's face became very red; hastily corking the flask and slipping it into his pocket, he answered:

"Not well, Mr. Hood, not at all well. In fact, I've been miserable for weeks. The doctor tells me it is some derangement of the bowels, and gave me a remedy for it. You found me taking a dose."

"Stick to the truth, Deacon," replied Hood laughing, "you never were in better health in your life. Men don't ride a race when they're sick, but do drink whiskey and lie about it when they're well. Come, go to the house, the rain may not stop for an hour or two, and in the meantime you may as well sit comfortably in an arm shair."

"Thank you," said the Deacon humbly, "but in coming here I did not intend to put you to any trouble."

"Don't talk of trouble, man," said the farmer heartily. "If I did not want you, I would not ask you — here, take the bit out of the mare's mouth while I get a sheaf of oats for her to nibble at, and then she will be as comfortable as ourselves."

Unbuckling the throat latch the Deacon slipped the bridle to the mare's neck so it would answer the purpose of a halter, and Hood, going through a door opening into the barn, soon reappeared with a bundle of unthreshed oats which he unbound and laid before her. This done, he raised the umbrella and escorted the Deacon to the house.

It was a comfortable place, this home of Ben Hood. There was nothing in it of elegance and fashion, but much that was old, plain and solid. The Hoods never bought an ornament; whatever they obtained in the way of furniture was for use; to be useful

it must be strong; being strong it lasted, and so long as it lasted it was not set aside for newer and more tasteful things. When Deacon Gum took the chair to which he was invited, his feet rested on the skin of a bear old Grandfather Hood had killed fifty years or more ago. The rug was still soft, though considerably worn. The antlers on the wall were from a buck brought down by the old man's rifle at a time when the only flesh obtainable for food was that of wild beasts. Here and there about the room were other mementoes of that early time of hard work, privation and peril. Ben Hood's father had left his mark there in many ways, but notably in one. Over the wide mantel was a picture of William Lloyd Garrison, not done in the highest style of art, and by no means ornamental, but still suggestive of the father's political bias. As a companion piece to this, Ben Hood, the son, had hung beside it a likeness of Wendell Phillips, engraved more recently than the other, and with greater skill.

"It was a sorry day for us," said Hood, in continuation of a conversation which I have thus far omitted, "when we opened our arms and our ballot boxes to the hordes of aliens who bear down upon us from every quarter of the globe; people so fixed in old world customs and so filled with old world ideas that instead of accepting the country as they find it, and as its founders designed it to be, begin the work of political and social revolution at once. Their distaste for their own governments has bred in them a hatred of all law. Their political depression there has been followed by a rebound here. Liberty seems to them a restraint and license an inalienable right. Taking advantage of our generosity in receiving them and in

according to them the privileges of citizenship, they press clamorously to the front demanding to hold the offices and make the laws, and so the sacred right of suffrage, instead of being reserved exclusively for the native born and home educated, is given over without restriction to all the various populations weeded from the crowded cities of the old world and thrown like refuse matter upon our shores." Here Hood's single sledge hammer fist struck the table before him violently, and springing to his feet as if he were about to pulverize the gentle Ebenezer for bringing all these evils upon an innocent country, he continued:

"The vile pauper from the slums of London, the ignorant, besotted and hardened reprobate from the cess pools of Dublin, the drunken and vicious vagabond from the dives of Vienna, the licentious and rotten profligate from the cellars of Paris, the escaped criminals from every section of Europe come crowding in upon us to become in a year or two voters and may be legislators of the great American Republic!"

"But many good men come, also," brother Gum suggested, timidly.

"True, man, true," replied Ben Hood, softening somewhat, "but it is impossible by law to distinguish between the two — to accept the good and reject the bad; we should therefore deny to all the right to vote, and limit suffrage to those born upon the soil. Surely the people of the United States do not realize how much they are losing by the advent of these foreigners, nor how much they are still likely to lose by encouraging others to come. By our tariff laws we are protected against the pauper labor of Europe, but not against that worse infliction, pauper laborers. These are being shipped over by the hundred thousands be-

cause it is cheaper to dump them down on our shores than to maintain them in the poor houses at home, and so they are coming," shouted Hood, as he walked excitedly to and fro, "by the million — faster a hundred fold than we can mold them over in our schools and assimilate them to the American standard! Coming with their vicious habits and inherent vices — with their crude notions of free government, without any intelligent idea of our constitution, our history, or our politics to take place, almost at once, in the great body of electors. Coming to compete with the native born American laborer, to revolutionize our habits; to engraft upon us the vicious customs from which our fathers fled in terror; coming to fill our workshops and mines with strikers; our cities with communists, beer shops, gin shops and vile Sunday theatres —"

"So they are, so they are."

"Coming to hasten the day when idleness shall lay down the law to honest industry, when mobs shall dictate to capital; when banks, and stores, and factories shall be gutted by irresponsible men, or, in obedience to laws passed by cringing demagogues at their dictation!" Swinging his single hand above his head as if he were waving the banner of the future, his voice rose to a battle cry, as he continued: "Is it not time to lift up the standard of the native born, and inscribe thereon in letters — of blood, if need be — Americans shall rule America, and ask all who love liberty, virtue, and honor; who love the God of our fathers, and the memory of their mothers, to rally round it and stand by it to the end? Let us make this the home of an honest, manly, temperate, educated people, not an asylum for imbeciles; not a penal colony for old world criminals; not a place for the propagation of vice; not

a land where immorality and irreligion shall be omnipotent, but one in which truth, justice, sobriety, cleanliness and thrift shall bear gentle and wholesome sway."

The speaker at this point grew considerably calmer, his tone less violent, and his manner more agreeable. "I would keep no one out; I should invite no one in; I should extend a hospitable hand to all who come bearing evidence of honesty and good intentions; but I should say 'the right to vote and hold office here belongs exclusively to those born on the soil.' Like Moses and his followers, you may look into the political Canaan, if you will, but only your children shall be permitted to enter and possess. We put none but *Americans on guard!*"

The rain had by this time ceased, and Ebenezer, rising, announced that he had an important matter of business to attend to, which required his presence at Rudd's corners before the night set in. He therefore took leave of Hood and resumed his journey.

X

JOHN RUDD

THE distance from Hood's house to Rudd's Corners was a little over four miles. The heavy rainfall had made the clay road muddy, and filled the ruts and low places with water. As Ebenezer had neither a change of outer nor under garments with him he deemed it best to proceed slowly, and with circumspection. He had suggested to Hood that he had important business before him which demanded immediate attention, but this was a harmless fiction. His anxiety to resume his journey arose in part from the fact that he could not tell at what moment that erratic and emphatic gentleman might be diverted by some unaccountable whimsey from the subject he was discussing to that of political prohibition, and the Deacon had no desire to engage in a controversy with him on this topic. There was, however, still another motive prompting him to get away from Hood as soon as possible. After he had been detected in the act of taking medicine from a mysterious and most ungodly looking bottle, and had in explanation of it professed to be in an enfeebled condition physically, he felt that consistency required him, while in Hood's presence, to have frequent pangs of the stomach, and to exhibit all the outward signs of inward distress. He was therefore anxious to escape in order to re-assume the comfortable and easy bearing of a man of robust health and cheerful spirits.

When he had ridden perhaps two miles, he heard the voices of men, the footfalls of horses, and the splash of wheels behind him; pretty soon unseemly songs, profanity and laughter smote his ears. Turning in the saddle, he saw a carriage coming toward him, and noticed that the horses attached to it were being urged to their utmost speed. Then, a moment later, a voice which might, for volume, have equalled Stentor's, called out not at all amiably:

"Git outer the way, there, you gol blasted ole fool, or we'll run over you."

The occupants of the carriage appeared to have no regard for Ebenezer's safety, and would have driven over him if they could. Indeed they might just as well have done so, for they dashed down so swiftly on him and with such flourishings of the whip and terrifying yells, that the mouse-colored mare, becoming alarmed, shyed suddenly to the left, and thereupon the good Deacon involuntarily quit his saddle and dropped with a great splash into a convenient puddle. Then there were roars of delight from the men in the carriage, and a craning of necks out of the sides of it to congratulate Gum on the alacrity with which he had dismounted, and the good judgment displayed in the selection of a place to light. Indeed, they were exceedingly merry and kept up a constant fusilade of taunt and sarcasm, until they got so far away their voices could be no longer heard.

For a brief space of time the reverend Ebenezer forgot his mission in life, and expressed his feelings so much after the fashion of the unholy that the atmosphere about him became lurid, and seemed to have in it a taint of brimstone. He mentioned the occupants of the carriage by name in connection with

an exceedingly hot place where he hoped they would in due time be forked over with red hot forks, grilled, baked, fried, and then turned over and toasted on the other side; and he hoped there would be no scarcity of fuel there, and no lack of industrious forkers to fork, for it was the Deacon's earnest desire that the gentlemen in the carriage should not be underdone for want of cooking. After he had expressed his sentiments on this subject as fully and vigorously as the limited number and amiable character of the words in the English language would allow, he turned to the mouse-colored mare and found much to his chagrin that this sagacious animal was disinclined to recognize him. The Deacon, however, finally succeeded in laying his hands on her bridle rein, and in remounting; but when he pressed the saddle the water oozed from beneath him and trickled down his limbs in discolored rivulets, making his flesh creep and his blood run cold. Then it occurred to him that if there ever was a time when a human being needed something to counteract the effect of dampness, it was the present, and so he had recourse again to the mysterious flask which he carried in an inside picket, where it could not attract the attention of the worldly, and become a stumbling block to the foolish. Having discharged this duty to his physical structure, Brother Ebenezer gave the mare two lively prods in the ribs with his heels and trotted along towards Rudd's Corners, wholly indifferent as to whether his apparel received a speck more or less of the mud flying from her hoofs.

The carriage which had just passed was occupied by Colonel Albright, the great Greenback orator, and three impecunious and irresponsible gentlemen of Cranberry. The latter had achieved some measure of

local distinction by giving their neighbors much unsolicited information respecting the management of national affairs. It has always been difficult for men of ordinary capacity to understand just how gentlemen whose mental grasp is insufficient to take in the details of the business of a peanut vender should without special study become thoroughly conversant with the financial operations of the United States. But the fact, inexplicable as it seems, must be recognized.

There was to be a Greenback rally at Rudd's. The gentlemen in the carriage were going to it. Placards announced that the distinguished and eloquent Colonel Albright would address the meeting and discuss the issues of the day in a fair, candid and statesmanlike manner. When Deacon Gum reached the Corners in the dusk of the evening, he saw many people standing in the road near Rudd's store, and conspicuous among them was the ponderous figure of the ruddy faced John Rudd. This gentleman was giving his friends much valuable information as to the amount of money there was *per capita,* and the amount there should be to make the wheels of commerce move easily, and enable farmers and laboring men to live comfortably and lay up something for a rainy day.

John Rudd had inherited a broad farm, but soon concluded there were easier ways of making money than by digging it out of the soil, and so engaged in the business of buying his neighbors' cattle and shipping them to eastern markets; then he opened a store and subsequently started an ashery, and thus in time became farmer, shipper, merchant and manufacturer. With his attention and energies divided between so many pursuits it followed that no one of them was ever prosecuted successfully. In a little while the

farm became unproductive for want of proper cultivation; the shipping ventures unprofitable for lack of attention to market reports and freight rates. The store a losing concern for lack of skill in purchasing and care in the keeping of accounts, and the ashery a failure for want of intelligent personal supervision.

The fact is John Rudd had neither the money to carry on his various enterprises nor the skill to manage them. He was compelled to borrow, then to meet old liabilities by contracting new ones, until finally he saw but one way to escape from his pecuniary troubles. If the Government were to double the currency by a further issue of greenbacks, it would depreciate the legal tender dollar and enable him to get more of them for his property than he could now obtain. He was, therefore, in favor of flooding the country with irredeemable paper money and making it as nearly worthless as possible. If his scheme were sanctioned by Congress his creditors would be forced to accept in liquidation of their claims one-half the value of what they gave, and the other half would remain in his possession.

Ginger's communistic theory of the common ownership of property is better founded and more defensible than Rudd's inflation scheme. The communist recognizes no man's title superior to his own, and bases his claim to an equal share with all others, upon an original and indefeasible right. The inflationist concedes the right of special ownership, but would deprive men of their property by a shabby legislative trick, and appropriate it to his own individual use.

Brother Ebenezer having reached the end of his journey, dismounted at the gate of Ezekiel Pitkin, a member of the Society of Friends, a thrifty farmer,

and as honest a man as ever trod shoe-leather. The Deacon proposes to honor Friend Pitkin by accepting his hospitality for the night, and after he has been generously entertained he will endeavor to obtain the trifling sum of fifty dollars from his worthy host as a contribution to the campaign fund of the Prohibition party. To accomplish this stroke of business he will have much to say of the growing sentiment in favor of political prohibition; of the many ways in which money may be honestly and advantageously used to promote the cause; of temperance tracts to be printed and distributed; of meetings to be held and speakers to be obtained; of much quiet but effective work to be done, all of which no one person can afford to do wholly at his own expense. In short, the appeal for money will be so adroitly and touchingly made, that the honest Quaker will finally exclaim:

"God bless thee, Friend Ebenezer! Thee shall not bear the burden alone. Thee has already done more than thy share, and must allow me to help in the great work — nay, nay, Ebenezer, thee must not decline my humble offering — perhaps it should be more, but it shall at least be this much now."

The people who had gathered about John Rudd's store in the early evening were now assembled in the little school-house to hear Colonel Albright. There were, perhaps, fifty persons in the room, counting men and boys. John Rudd was selected to preside, and without preliminary remarks, introduced the speaker to the audience. The Colonel's first attempt to rise was only partially successful. His legs seemed disinclined to assume and maintain a perpendicular attitude and were apparently disposed to double up or

dodge off and precipitate him onto the chairman. Their eccentric behavior prompted the small boys in the audience to titter, nudge each other, and indulge in mischievous winks. In their innocency and ignorance these young gentlemen concluded the Colonel had been imbibing too frequently, and that there would be, therefore, rare fun before the meeting ended. But lads know little of the unreliability of mature legs, and can have no conception of the multitude of instances in which their preverse and unstable conduct have put the reputations of respectable men in jeopardy — men noted for their piety, men of family, men conspicuous in field and forum. Men who would not for the world have set a bad example to the young. SMALL BOY, BE JUST! Bear in mind that after legs mature they often become difficult to control, and sometimes wholly unmanageable.

The Colonel finally succeeded in getting some slight advantage of his nether extremities, by clutching with both hands the back of the presiding officer's chair, and addressing the audience over John Rudd's head. His opening, however, was a surprise to his hearers. It consisted of a brief but eloquent summary of the virtues of the great American Ache Annihilator. This medicine had never failed to effect a cure. It had given relief to thousands. Health was man's greatest blessing. Vanderbilt with all his millions could not be happy with a jumping toothache. Nature had provided a cheap and simple remedy. He had it with him —

At this point the Colonel's legs weakened so suddenly that he disappeared behind John Rudd's bulky form. Thinking he had gone down for the remedy, the boys whistled and laughed, and seemed about to jump out of their young skins. But they were mis-

taken. The Colonel did not have the medicine with him. When he came up John Rudd rose and turning his back to the audience, confronted the orator in a very angry and dictatorial manner, and for a time seemed disposed to assist the Colonel's legs in their efforts to overthrow him. The action of the chairman, however, instead of disconcerting the speaker, simply reminded him of the question he was expected to discuss, and he at once proceeded with his discourse.

——The great remedy for all the aches and ills of the commonwealth is greenbacks, more money, good money — money that will be a first lien on the real estate, live stock, brains and muscle of the country. Money that will bear upon its face the image of the American eagle — a bird that can fly higher, screech louder and fight harder than any other bird on the face of the earth (applause). Fellow citizens, that bird's tail brushes the snow-clad peaks of Alaska; his beak touches the tepid waters of the Gulf of Mexico, while his outstretched wings cover a continent and dip in the waters of two oceans (tremendous applause). This is the kind of money for a free people to have. It is the best money the sun ever shone on; far better than gold, and it may be made as abundant as the leaves of the forest. We have now but a beggarly thousand million of money of all sorts. What would be the effect on business if another thousand million were issued? It would double the price of your farms; it would enable you to obtain two hundred dollars for a horse which now sells for one hundred. A sheep which fetches four dollars would then bring eight. A bushel of wheat that now sells for one dollar would then be valued at two. Can anybody say the farmers would not be benefited by an increase of the currency?

("No, no," and cheers.) Such an assertion would be absurd. How is it with the laboring man — the hard-fisted son of toil? His wages would be increased a hundred per cent. He would get two dollars a day instead of one. Will anybody claim two dollars are not better than one? (Applause.) Come, now, let us reason together like sensible men. Why not double every man's wealth by doubling the money of the country? Why not? Do you say the money wouldn't be good? Ah, no, you couldn't say that, for you know everybody would be eager to get as much of it as possible ("that's so" and cheers); you must admit, therefore, that it would be good. Now, if by adding a thousand million to the present volume of currency we can double our wealth; by the addition of still another thousand million we can treble it (applause), you see, therefore, how easy it is for Congress to make everybody rich and happy. A heifer which now sells for fifty dollars would then sell for one hundred and fifty. The Thanksgiving turkey which now goes in the market for the beggarly sum of a dollar would then fetch three. Every farmer's wife, therefore, should favor an increase of paper money (applause). It would treble the price of her domestic fowls, and a common hen's egg would then be worthy of her special care, for from the egg would come a chicken, and for the chicken would come a greenback dollar, as much almost as a farm hand now obtains for a hard day's work (cheers). Fellow citizens, the Greenbackers have no candidate and will have none unless they conclude to nominate John Rudd, our most worthy chairman (tumultuous applause). If they were to put him in the field your speaker would stand by him to the end (cheers). But in case no nomination is made by the

Greenbackers, there will still be something at the polls for Greenbackers to do. There is a choice for them to make between two evils. The Democrats are bad enough, Heaven knows, but the Republicans are infinitely worse; so bad, in fact, that if they were to succeed in this election the money kings of the country would be omnipotent ("that's so"); the poor, trampled in the dust; the currency contracted, business paralyzed, and the nation bankrupted. ("True, true.") The party which goes part way in the right direction should always be preferred to one bound to continue altogether in the wrong, and so in this contest the interest of the Greenbacker and patriot is with Andrew Jackson Travis. (Applause.)

As Colonel Albright proceeded with his two hours' discourse, his mind seemed not only to gradually expand, and to operate with increasing freedom, but his articulation grew clearer and more musical, and when the meeting adjourned it was John Rudd's deliberate judgment that notwithstanding the Colonel's peculiar and apparently irrelevant opening he had made the ablest and most eloquent speech ever delivered in Cranberry County. The argument was absolutely incontrovertible and overwhelming.

XI

ROBERT BRETT

LEAVING the good people of Cranberry County for a while in charge of Brother Ebenezer and Colonel Albright, the reader will be asked to ascend the Great Lakes as far as Duluth, then follow the line of the Northern Pacific railway through forests and swamps until it enters upon an undulating prairie, and then on by construction trains, until schools, churches, homes, and all the marks of civilization, except the iron track over which he travels are left hundreds of miles behind. When at last he reaches the end of the railway, he will find spread out before him a canvass city which last week was five miles east of its present site and next week will probably be five miles west. It is known as Hell-on-wheels, and its population, including those lodged and fed in rough boarding house cars, consists of some thousands of workingmen, engaged in building a railway across the continent.

Among the stalwart laborers gathered here is one with whose name the reader is not wholly unfamiliar. He has been employed in one capacity and another on the line of the road ever since its construction began. For months while in the timber region he swung an axe and drew an axeman's wages, lost in the great army of working men around him. In time it was observed by the leader of the gang to which he belonged, that he always responded to his name at the morning roll-call; then, that he could be trusted in the management

of small affairs; then, that in the rough encounters which frequently occur among men of different nationalities he was a dangerous antagonist to meet. Being one of the oldest residents of Hell-on-wheels, he was occasionally referred to as authority respecting certain matters connected with the earlier history of the enterprise, and thus he was brought in contact with the leading men of the construction company, who, finding him quiet, thoughtful, and fairly educated, finally ventured to sublet portions of their work to him as they did to others. After completing one contract satisfactorily to his employers, he obtained other and larger ones, and so for three years he had been making money rapidly and investing it in the seven per cent. land grant bonds of the railway company. He could now count up over one hundred thousand dollars in these securities as the reward of his labor, skill and privation.

Had he enough? Would it be well for him to remain longer in Hell-on-wheels? Could he not find a better life elsewhere? He had labored diligently, should he not rest while pleasure could still be found in resting? In five or ten years more, youth would be gone, the meridian of life at hand, and thereafter the descent to the grave rapid; should he take his vacation now, or then? Was there anything in the mere accumulation of money to afford him pleasure? Money unused was no whit better than money unpossessed. A hundred thousand was a round sum; it was seven thousand a year. Another three or four years of labor might double the principal, but would the larger amount pay for the sacrifice required to obtain it? What good can come from being able to draw a check for a million if one never has occasion to do it? Money

is valueless except for use, and then only valuable when used for a good purpose.

There, for instance, is old Grinderscoop, of St. Paul. He has two millions, but neither chick nor child. He has been robbing his neighbors in a polite and lawful way for forty years. The interest of his money for one month would supply all his natural wants for the remainder of his life. How is he benefited by the ownership of two millions? Suppose the money were lost and he should never know it, would he not continue just as happy as he is now? A month of youth with all its capacities for enjoyment would be worth more to him than a hundred millions. Nobody wants a thousand umbrellas when it rains, one only can be used. Enough is sufficient, and more than enough, too much.

Entering into Robert Brett's discussion with himself on this occasion, was his recollection of Gertrude Frazier. She had told him to go, and he thought at the time if her love for him had been as strong as his for her, she would not have been so ready — nay, eager to have him leave. It may be, indeed, she had never cared for him at all, but had accepted him as the best of those around her, none of whom was exactly to her liking. It was seven years ago that he left Cranberry. Gertrude was a young girl then; she may have married since. Many men are eager enough to win such a woman; she was probably married. But then she was not the only woman in the world, and there were also many pleasant objects in it besides women. A man who has lived in Hell-on-wheels for five years could probably enjoy himself pretty well any place outside of it. It would be pleasant at any rate to visit

the scenes of his boyhood; to drop a line for bass, and get a whiff of the lake air again.

At the conclusion of his meditations, Brett whistled for his servant.

"John, tell Craig to come over if he has leisure."

"Ef he hab what, sah?"

"Tell Craig I want to see him."

"Yas, sah."

When John withdrew, Brett took a book from a drawer of the table before which he sat, turned the leaves of it, until he found the page on which a debit and credit account was kept with outfit; running up the two columns of figures he ascertained this fictitious personage was indebted to him a little over ten thousand dollars. By the time this was done and the calculation verified by a review of the additions and subtractions, the man he had sent for entered the tent.

"Craig," said Brett, handing him the book, "look over that account. The articles on hand are in fair condition."

The man ran his eyes down the list of items slowly. It embraced horses, mules, wagons, scrapers, plows, shovels, picks and supplies of beef, pork, flour, etc. Such articles, in brief, as railway contractors must have to prosecute their work.

"A little over ten thousand," he said, looking up.

"Yes," replied Brett. "Now I have this proposition to make. Give me your check for six thousand, take the property, and I'll not bid against you on to-morrow's letting."

"Are you going away?"

"If you accept, I shall leave for St. Paul to-morrow."

"Make out the bill of sale. Have you a blank on the First Minneapolis?"

"I keep my account in St. Paul."

"While you are writing the bill of sale, I'll go to my tent and fill out a check."

The next morning Brett left for St. Paul; two days subsequently he drew enough money from his bank for current wants, obtained drafts on Jay Cooke and Company, New York, for fifteen thousand dollars, and started on the evening train for the east.

At Chicago he stopped off intending to remain long enough to supply himself with such articles of clothing as he needed. Proceeding to the Sherman House he took a bath and dined, and then left the hotel for a stroll about the city. He had been sauntering along the streets for two hours or more, pausing here and there to look into the windows of jeweler, bookseller and merchant, when he observed men hurrying past him with an expression of great anxiety, if not of terror on their faces. Going into the Palmer House he found the lobby filled with excited men; not desiring to become involved in such an assemblage, he turned to retrace his steps to the Sherman, and had proceeded but a short distance when the cry of a newsboy took the very blood from his face, for it told him a great misfortune had befallen the country, and one which would press with special severity upon himself. He bought a paper and as he walked along the crowded avenue, ran his eyes over the telgraphic column. Jay Cooke and Company had failed, and business houses from the Atlantic to the Pacific were being swept down by the financial cyclone like rotten reeds before a tempest. His drafts were probably worthless; his bonds certainly of but little value and utterly unsalable. All

he had upon which he could rely with any confidence were the few banknotes in his pocket. These were good because the Government of the United States stood behind them.

Hastening to his hotel he ascertained the first train for St. Paul would depart in an hour. He paid his bill and ordering a cab proceeded to the depot. He was anxious to get off and might as well pass an idle hour at the station waiting for the departure of the train as to spend it elsewhere. To Brett the time seemed to move with exceeding slowness, as it always does to those eager to set out upon a journey of either business or pleasure. A few persons having no visible means of support were loitering about apparently indifferent whether the hands of the depot clock went forward or stood still. Their heads being as empty as their pockets, they took the world easily and were admirably prepared to withstand the pecuniary whirlwind which was now sweeping the country. Brett would probably have regarded them with envy if he had thought about them at all, but his attention was just then again attracted by the newsboy's cry: "Failure of Jay Cooke & Co.; all about the panic." Buying a second paper he glanced hurriedly over the head lines as he walked impatiently about the platform and skimmed through the telegraphic column, but as the first reports were simply confirmed and reinforced by others equally alarming, he cast the sheet aside.

The people were gathering now; a man stood at the gateway ready when time was up to open it and admit the outgoing travelers to the train. Brett paused for a moment, looked up at the clock and saw there were still five minutes to wait. Turning to resume his walk he was confronted by a familiar face. It was

that of Archie Frazier. The recognition was mutual, and the recollection of the old quarrel quickened the blood of the two men, and perhaps prompted them to clinch their fists, and make ready for battle; but the belligerent impulse passed from Brett's heart instantly, and a moment later Frazier extending his hand, said:

"Forgive me; let us meet as friends."

Accepting the proffered hand, Brett asked:

"Do you come from — home — from Cranberry?"

"No — not recently; I have been away over six years."

"Have you heard from your — from there lately?"

"Not a word. Have you?"

"No."

The gate was thrown open now and the two men passed through it together, but separated a moment later; they were going in different directions.

The thoughts suggested by this accidental meeting took possession of Brett, but after a while his mind reverted to his pecuniary troubles, and continued to pursue them until late at night. If he had never had the money it is probable he would never have felt the need of it. Certainly he would never have imagined such a loss could affect him keenly. It was perhaps not the money now of which he thought most, but the impossibility which the loss entailed of entering upon the line of life for which he longed. After a time, and before he dropped off to sleep, he was able to think over the matter more calmly and clearly. It occurred to him that much might still be saved from the wreck. The bank from which he obtained the drafts, if unable to stand up against the first fury of the storm, might soon resume and make good its obligations. Even the bonds might ultimately be worth something. These

were a first lien on certain sections of land through which the road was built. But then again, if the road were never completed to the Pacific, it might not pay running expenses, and hence cease to be operated altogether. In this event the lands on either side of it would be inaccessible to settlers and therefore valueless. Still Jay Cooke and Company, having had so much, must now have something left, and this would go part way, at least, toward the payment of their debts. At any rate it would do no good to worry over the matter to-night, or to speculate farther as to results. When he reached St. Paul he would probably obtain some definite information upon which to base calculations as to the probable outcome of it all.

The bank from which Brett obtained his drafts had suspended. It was the St. Paul correspondent of Jay Cooke and Company, and had made large advances on Northern Pacific bonds. There was now no market for these securities, and so far as men could tell no value to them. Work on the railroad had ceased; workmen were making angry demands for their wages; contractors and traders were besieging banks and money-lenders for accommodations, but the currency of the country had wholly disappeared. Even a Government six per cent. could now hardly find a purchaser. A million of productive property could not tempt a thousand dollars in currency from the strong box. There was nothing in the estimation of the public so precious as spot cash, and everybody began to clutch and hoard. Business men, theretofore in high credit, acknowledged with shamed faces their inability to meet maturing obligations. Men lost confidence in each other. Fear of bankruptcy and ruin dominated every thought and controlled every action. The cur-

rent of business was as suddenly congealed as a stream might be which ventured into the frigid temperature of an Arctic winter. And yet, strange to say, not a dollar — not a penny had been lost from the wealth of the country. The volume of currency had not been diminished to the extent of a single mill. Actual property had in no way been destroyed or lessened. There were lands enough and houses enough; merchandise, manufactures, and food enough. The only thing lost was confidence in the integrity and capacity of men.

The thing called credit had been stricken down. Every man, therefore, held what he had, seized what he could and felt that he was surrounded by robbers. Strong men wept and spent sleepless nights, not over the loss of fortunes, but the loss of what they regarded as infinitely more valuable, commercial honor. Generous men in their eagerness to maintain their reputation for punctuality in business affairs, were guilty of outrageous oppression. Men who had gone into the bloodiest battles of the war with confidence and cheerfulness, now went to their offices with trembling limbs, opened their doors with quaking hearts, then stood in an agony of suspense, well knowing that at any moment a claim might be presented which would wring from them a humiliating confession of inability to pay.

The officers of the bank with which Brett had kept his account assured him his special deposit of bonds would be returned to him at any hour, but for the amounts of the drafts he would have to wait until an improvement in the condition of monetary affairs made payment possible. With no prospect of finding immediate employment, and with barely sufficient

ready money to support him through the coming winter, he turned away from the bank determined like a good soldier to keep his eyes to the front. No amount of worrying could add to the value of either his bonds or drafts, but energy, perseverance and skill could contribute much to his future happiness.

The financial storm of 1873, though more violent than any which preceded it, occasioned no permanent damage to the business of the country; on the contrary it simply precipitated a settlement, which under existing circumstances, could not have been long postponed, and accomplished in a few months what otherwise would only have been effected by years of inactivity and dullness.

The reaction in business set in very soon. Those who found they had not been hurt grew suddenly bold; those who discovered they had been more scared than hurt insisted that they had not been frightened at all. There was, however, for the three years following, little or no demand for improved farms in the older sections of the country. Real estate, generally the last thing to be depressed in its market value by a panic, is the last to be favorably affected by a revival. By '76 and '77, however, the panic of '73 was in a great degree forgotten. The professional kite-flyers were by that time all out ready to catch the wind, when it should shift to suit them. It had not come yet with all the power and steadiness desired, but it was coming, and when it did come, the old boys — adepts in the business — were very active, and put up kites which certainly looked well and soared high and ultimately brought much profit to those who held the string.

There, for instance, were the great railroad builders, Fraud, Ripper and Grab. They had several hand-

some and profitable kites afloat. They were the originators and constructors of the All-Steal railway, a road extending from Jacktown to the Lake. The bonds of this Company, executed with great artistic skill, promised a fair rate of interest, and were represented by Mr. Grab, the financial man of the concern, to be peculiarly adapted to the wants of widows and orphans, and of old gentlemen who had retired from active business, and did not, therefore, desire to be troubled with the frequent investment of money. The bonds issued represented about three times the value of the property bonded. Thirty-three per cent. of the money derived from their sale was used to construct the road, and the other sixty-seven went into the pockets of Fraud, Ripper and Grab. But these honest gentlemen, not satisfied with so small a profit, issued twice as much stock as there were bonds, put it on the New York Stock Exchange, and then began to deal in it themselves. Fraud through an agent would sell a thousand shares to Ripper, then Ripper would sell a thousand shares at an advance to Grab, and by this time Fraud would become furious to buy back again, and so according to the reports of the Stock Exchange there was wonderful activity in All-Steal stock. The price of it was rapidly going up.

Soon, little paragraphs appeared in the newspapers commending the All-Steal railway, and assuring investors that it was certain to pay a dividend. Then Fraud gave a half dozen brokers one hundred dollars each to reward them for sending out "pointers" to their customers — suggestions that it would be well to try a little All-Steal, as it was the most active stock in the market. And so while Fraud was selling to Ripper, and Ripper to Grab, and a large business being

done, apparently, the newspapers announced the sales to an eager public, and the stock climbed higher until finally honest men who held trust funds, bought with a view to pocketing the profits if they could sell at an advance, and turning the stock over to the widows and orphans if they could not. Rural speculators, also, began to dip in eagerly, fearful if they did not strike soon and boldly, the stock would get beyond their reach; and so the circle of buyers extended until finally Fraud & Co. suddenly let go and unloaded the whole batch of worthless stuff on to outsiders.

Fraud, Ripper and Grab are worth a million each. The holders of All-Steal stock and bonds, however, are just now in straightened circumstances, and somewhat depressed in spirits. Mrs. Grab has gone to Europe; Mrs. Green, who bought bonds, has not. Mrs. Ripper enjoys the summer at Newport; Mrs. Folly, whose husband invested in All-Steal stock, spends the heated term at home. The elegant Mrs. Fraud entertains handsomely at her new house on Madison Square, and is very generous in her donations to the heathen. Mrs. Pigeon, whose thousands went to pay for Mrs. Fraud's house, is now keeping boarders, and seldom has anything to drop into the contribution box. Of course it is all right. If it were not, the law would take cognizance of it; respectable people would denounce it, and the churches would call attention to it. Fraud & Co. are simply remarkable geniuses, great financiers, enterprising gentlemen, and therefore, worthy of the admiration and respect of everybody. Their scheme won; they deserved their good fortune. Let the tongue of envy wag if it will. No fair man can blame Mr. and Mrs. Ripper and their co-partners, male and female, for looking out for

themselves. The transaction was strictly lawful. Everybody should have known what the road was, what the stock was worth, and what security there was for the payment of the bonds.

The time for good kite flying was rapidly approaching, but not at hand, when the affairs of the Northern Pacific Railway Company were reorganized. One of the features of the scheme proposed by the new managers of the enterprise was the payment of the bonds of the road with the lands granted by Congress to aid in its construction.

While patiently awaiting a revival of business, Robert Brett had not only succeeded in supporting himself comfortably, but in laying aside a little money from his earnings. His bank having resumed, the drafts on Jay Cooke and Company were credited back to his account, and the amount was now subject to his order. He knew the character of every section of land through which the Northern Pacific road passed; the depth and fertility of its soil, and its proximity to water were matters to which the successful prosecution of his work as a contractor required him to give special attention. When, therefore, the opportunity to convert the bonds of the road into the lands of the Company was presented, he at once exchanged his one hundred thousand dollars in bonds at their par value, with the interest accrued thereon, for choice sections of the great wheat belt of the Northwest.

It was a broad, handsome domain he thus became the possessor of, embracing little lakes, patches of wooded land, and great stretches of rolling prairie. At first his nearest neighbor was ten miles away, and some ten miles farther off a few rough houses of a prospective city had been built. Here and there along

the line of railway, settlers had within the past few years broken the soil and put in their first crops at a venture. The situation would have been a lonely one to most men, but Brett's own thoughts were excellent company for him, and the long days of summer were even too short for all the work his busy hands found to do.

There was a comfortable house to be erected on the wooded shores of Lake Gertrude. There were shelters to be constructed for the cattle and horses required to enable him to break up a hundred acres for the next spring's seeding. There was the wild grass to be cut and cured for the subsistence of his live stock during the winter. There were plows, harrows and grain drills to buy and then to be cared for. There were barns to be built for the storage of next season's crops. There were men to be employed to aid in all this, and they must be fed and housed. Almost before he was aware of it, therefore, the summer had gone and the winter come. Good books do much to shorten and enliven the longest and dullest months, and of these Robert Brett had brought with him a well selected stock. When spring arrived, the ground, broken the summer and fall before, was harrowed over and then seeded to wheat. Pretty soon a hundred acres were green with their first crop of growing grain; and a little later the yellow and drooping blades were ready to be harvested. What a grand crop it was, and how suggestive of the fertility and value of the wild land about it!

The railway officials had consented to make a stopping place for trains on Brett's land, and near his residence if he would erect, for the accommodation of the traveling public, a modest station house. This he

did between the time of seeding and that of harvesting, and now, almost every day, men seeking land either for speculation or for settlement would obtain a glimpse of Brett's magnificent field of ripening grain, stop off to look the country over, and while doing so, find entertainment at his cabin.

The soil and climate of the locality were especially favorable for the growing of wheat. During the succeeding twelve months, settlers came pouring in so rapidly that Brett was encouraged to lay out a town and offer the lots at public sale to the highest bidder. There was no lack of buyers, and the competition among them was quite spirited. Thirty days later there were some houses occupied, others ready for occupancy, and many more in process of construction. The impression became widespread that the town was destined to be an important city, and that no more profitable use could be made of money than in purchasing lots in it and lands about it.

Brett's estimate of the value of his property was so moderate he found no difficulty in disposing easily and rapidly of such portions as he desired to part with. From the proceeds of his sales he was soon able to invest over two hundred thousand dollars in Government Fours. This was a comfortable sum and it left him free to take the world leisurely if it were his choice to do so.

He had never been able to decide that it would be well to pass the remainder of his life amid the rough scenes of a pioneer settlement. No amount of money, he thought, would compensate him for such a sacrifice. But what should he do — where seek the better life for which he longed? This, in his leisure moments, was the constantly recurring question.

While sitting in his cabin door on a pleasant evening in September, with the moonlit lake spread like a sheet of rippling silver before him, the tender strains of a flute, wafted from the village by a favorable wind, fell on his ear, and diverted the current of his thought from lots and lands and bonds to the half forgotten incidents of his childhood. To the mother who had now been under the sod for over twenty years; to the school house where his first lessons were learned; to the creeks where he had fished, and the marshes where he had hunted; to his old playmates; to his father, and finally to Gertrude Frazier. Where is she now? It is a little over ten years since they parted. Ten years! A long period when filled with disappointment and suspense, and those who live through it often become old, worn and broken. He was poor ten years ago. A marriage with Gertrude then would have been altogether to his advantage; but she did not seem to think so; possibly she did, but apparently she did not. Was it consideration for his own safety, which prompted her to bid him depart, or did she in that moment realize that her love for her own kin was stronger than her regard for him? Possibly he should not have obeyed her last command so literally; perhaps he should have communicated with her since. But could he, as an honorable man, seek to hold her to a compact which brought everything to him, and gave nothing to her? The bargain, if it may be called such, was, as he now regarded it, an unequal one. Were he to insist upon its consummation there would at least be ground for a suspicion that he was looking to her fortune, rather than to herself. This view of the matter had been suggested by her brothers. To wed for such a purpose would be robbery; to be suspected of entertaining such

a thought was extremely humiliating. The resolution not to return until he could meet her on equal terms with respect to wealth, had now governed him for years. It had required a long time to reach the point toward which he had been struggling; so long, indeed, that Gertrude had possibly ceased to think of him, and probably had formed new ties, which would be a perpetual barrier between them; and yet, even in his most despondent moments, he never cast aside the license authorizing them to marry. It was the spur which had urged him on to fortune. Still there had been many times when, perplexed with doubts and fears, he impatiently and angrily declared he would not trouble himself more about her; she had not treated him well, and would have married him in spite of opposition if she had loved him half as earnestly as he did her. But notwithstanding all these murmurings, his heart, like the needle of a compass, always pointed, when at rest, in the one direction.

The incidents of their first acquaintance while attending school; the slow approaches to intimacy; the first look, word and act which suggested love; the avowal and acceptance; the subsequent hostility of her father and brothers, and his final determination to settle the matter in spite of their opposition, and her timidity, were gone over a thousand times. Indeed, the thought of Gertrude was never absent from his mind for many hours together, even when his business was most urgent and perplexing.

XII

RICHARD DUNDREN

DUNDREN'S farm was put up at public sale for the second time the latter part of September, and the sheriff had again endorsed on his writ of execution, "Not sold for want of bidders." Thereupon a new appraisement had been ordered, and the sheriff was now giving the legal notice that the property would be offered for the third time on the twenty-eighth of October. There was nothing either of the realty or personalty exempt from execution, and hence nothing Dundren could dispose of at private sale; but he was no less thoughtful and painstaking in his work of gathering in the crops and caring for the live stock, than if his labor were certain to net him a handsome reward. The money due Peter Sked must be paid. Dundren was not the man to go through life shunning his creditors, or facing them with brazen indifference. He felt himself bound, not only by the law, but by his own honor, to pay what he agreed to pay, and as he agreed to pay it. He could not entertain the thought of leaving to his children the reputation of an insolvent debtor. His father and grandfather had paid their debts, and had been inclined to mention it rather too frequently perhaps, as an honorable thing for men to do. In fact, they had sometimes spoken in contemptuous terms of certain persons who had been notoriously delinquent in this regard. There for instance were the Blisters of whom Richard

Dundren's father could not speak in gentleness. The good Mrs. Blister was in early life an honest seamstress, but her husband becoming rich by a fortunate speculation, built her a hundred thousand dollar residence, and then like a prudent man failed, and, though living in affluence, was so extremely poor he gave no attention whatever to the demands of his creditors. Mrs. Blister was so impoverished, also, by her husband's failure that she even declined to refund to her old serving woman the small savings of a lifetime which had been deposited with Mr. Blister for safe keeping, and so the broken-down old servant was trundled off to the infirmary to be supported at the cost of the County.

It is probable Dundren senior, in his criticism of Mrs. Blister, did not take into consideration the fact that a woman of her standing in society must necessarily drive to church in a carriage, and dress expensively. It is probable, also, that he failed to remember that she had the poor Mr. Blister on her hands and was in duty bound to provide well for him, and that the income derived from the one hundred thousand dollars invested in seven per cents which had been turned over to her with the house, was but a meagre allowance for so extensive an establishment as she maintained. It may be true, therefore, that notwithstanding all the elder Dundren said to the contrary, the courts were right in assuming that the masculine Blister owed all the money and the feminine Blister owned all the property. One can see very readily, at any rate, that Mrs. Blister was a great blessing to Mr. Blister, and that it would have been especially severe on them if by hook or crook they had been compelled

to refund to that wretch of a serving woman the money due her, and in consequence been unable to spend the summer months at Saratoga.

There is another man, also, to whom the elder Dundren always referred in words of bitterness. This is no less a personage than the pious brother Fleecer, who carries on an extensive and profitable business in the name of Fleecer, Agent. Brother Fleecer is the agent of sister Fleecer, his wife. The male Fleecer some years ago suddenly failed, and the female Fleecer as suddenly became rich. Just how sister Fleecer got the advantage of brother Fleecer on the tilting board of fortune, nobody but themselves can exactly tell; but that it was done fairly there need be no doubt; at least, brother Fleecer has never intimated to any one that sister Fleecer did not play honestly with him. One theory of the matter is that when the Fleecers were joined in holy wedlock, some thirty or forty years ago, sister Fleecer inherited a four posted bedstead, a feather mattress, two home-made linen sheets, a yarn coverlet, and a patch-work quilt, the whole being worth, at a liberal estimate, fifty dollars. This of course was sister Fleecer's separate estate, and it was no more than right, therefore, that brother Fleecer should pay her for the property like an honest man, and this it is claimed he did. Fifty dollars at ten per cent. compounded every sixty days according to banker's rules, would in say forty years amount to about all brother Fleecer had in his possession; and so he liquidated the debt due sister Fleecer, and allowed his other creditors to whistle for their pay.

There is still another gentleman of whom the elder Dundren used to speak in scorn, namely, our venerable society friend, the Honorable Mr. Gouger. No gen-

tleman dresses better than Mr. Gouger, few live more luxuriously, none have handsomer pictures, and rarer books. He is polite, suave, easy, eminently respectable, the friend and patron of everybody, and so honorable that his favorite theme is honor. How does Gouger obtain the money to supply himself with all the good things of the world? By ste—, no, no, Gouger would not steal, for Gouger is an honorable man; but Gouger will borrow a thousand dollars, more or less, promise to pay it back next week and never think of it again until his attention is called to it by the needy creditor. Then Gouger will regret exceedingly that he has been so negligent, agree to call around the next day and arrange the matter, and treat his creditor so courteously the poor victim is ashamed of himself for having alluded to a subject so disagreeable, and goes off feeling that Gouger is the best of fellows, a perfect gentleman, and one whom it is an honor to know. If Gouger looks for his creditor the next day it is to avoid him. The idea of paying the debt did not enter his head when he contracted it, has not since, and will not hereafter. The material things of the Gouger estate belong either to Mrs. Gouger or the young Gougers. Gouger himself has nothing left but honor, and he manages to make a good deal out of it in the course of a year.

Father Dundren was wont to say honor and religion were admirable qualities in men, and of more value than diamonds; but as God only could tell the genuine from the spurious, it was unsafe to accept what purported to be either as security for a loan. Men who pledged their honor for the fulfillment of a promise, did so generally because they regarded it as the least valuable of their possessions.

There had been no time during the last ten or fifteen years when Mrs. Dundren could not have retired from active life with at least fifty thousand dollars laid by in good interest paying bonds if Richard, her husband, had discharged his obligation to her as fairly and liberally as brother Fleecer paid his debt to sister Fleecer, and if Dick Dundren had possessed Mr. Gouger's fine sense of honor Mrs. Dundren would long ago have been the owner of Cherry Farm, and that precious old rascal Peter Sked would have lost a round sum and had little sympathy from the people who knew him. But Dundren could not bear to have any one think he was indebted to Peter Sked, or any other man, for the clothes on his back and the flesh on his bones. It did not lie in his mouth to say Sked's claim was not an honest one. If there were any dispute on this score the courts should settle it. He should stand up to his contract like a man, not dodge out of it like a sneak thief. As to this claim, however, there was no dispute. The notes had affixed to them the name of Richard Dundren; this was not only proof conclusive that the claim was just, but the end of controversy.

XIII

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

CRANBERRY County was at this time in convulsions. The henchmen of Travis and Popper were on the run night and day. Money was being doled out by the candidates somewhat sparingly, but promises were distributed with a reckless disregard of economy. There were many desirable offices in prospect — post offices in the district, and clerkships at Washington. At least a thousand men expected to obtain place at the public crib if Travis were elected, and as many if Popper should be successful. Nineteen hundred and seventy-five of these enthusiastic gentlemen were destined to be disappointed, but as yet they had no suspicion of this and would have none until their labors in the canvass were fully ended. They were not at all likely, therefore, to relax their efforts until the battle was either lost or won.

Brother Ebenezer and his mouse colored mare were taking the world, bad as it was, with philosophic cheerfulness. In their numerous expeditions against the Prince of Darkness, they never lacked for forage and shelter, and never paid for either. Indeed, the Deacon could live abroad much cheaper than at home, and always kept on the war path until due regard for the condition of his under clothing compelled him to return to his own domicile.

Colonel Albright had delivered several very eloquent and effective speeches, but just now in the pinch

and critical hour of the battle, he was spending altogether too much precious time at widow More's cottage. Lilian's bright eyes and broad acres were more attractive than even the applause of delighted audiences. The sun of popular favor was shining on him and he must improve it to gather in the harvest. A month later he might not have a penny in his pocket, and possibly not a pocket to put a penny in. Mustard had for some weeks succeeded in either keeping him sober or concealing him when otherwise. The escapade on the occasion of his visit to Rudd's Corners was laughed over quietly but not spoken of to the injury of his reputation. So far as the people of Cranberry knew he was all he seemed to be, a bright, active, reputable fellow, who was likely to make his mark in the world. Lilian More had been alarmed by his behavior on the night of the first day of their acquaintance, but in thinking it all over and over again she had attributed his strange conduct to the impulsiveness of a loving heart, and this solution of the problem was not only very flattering, but exceedingly gratifying to her.

The fact of his being an eloquent public speaker was an interesting theme to many of her female associates in Cranberry. His bright sayings were often quoted in her hearing. The comments on his personal appearance and prospects were always favorable. The possibilities of such a man were very great. It was with a timid, blushing, but rejoicing pride Lilian confessed to herself that all these grand possibilities might be shared by her. What splendid visions of the future they suggested! What political triumphs for him, and social triumphs for her! She had read of great receptions in which the wives of prominent men cut brilliant figures. Might not she look forward to some

such enviable distinction? But may be after all he would not deem a simple country girl worthy to share life with him; and yet he seemed ready at any moment to invite her to share it, and if he did what should be her answer?

She had now met him five or six times in her mother's house; never wholly alone since the evening when 'Squire Wharton overtook them on the bridge, and delighted them with entertaining stories. She was expecting him this afternoon. He had sent a note to her saying he would call. Poor Jack Wharton had not been thought of for weeks; she had been contemplating richer things than it was possible for Jack to give. Let her acquaintance with the Colonel turn out as it might, the line fence between the More land and the Wharton's could now never be removed.

She took up a pen from the table before her and wrote on a sheet of note paper, "Mrs. Colonel Albright;" "Mrs. Lilian Albright;" Mrs. Lilian More Albright." Then tearing the paper into a hundred shreds cast it out of the window. She now went to the door and looked eagerly toward the village, but there was no one in sight, and so she walked out to the gate, then back to the house, and then around to the kitchen where her mother was paring apples for the next pie baking. Here she concluded to wait until there should be a rap on the door to indicate that somebody had come. The mother looking up from her work, saw that her daughter was prepared to receive company, and asked:

"Is the Colonel coming?"

"Yes, mother."

The flushing face told the mother more than the girl's words, but she had suspected it before, and was

perhaps pleased and flattered to find she had guessed correctly. Lilian now felt quite certain her mother understood the nature of her regard for Colonel Albright, and approved it. Much of all that occurs in the family is fully known though never put in language. A blush, a glance, a sigh, often tell a long story more accurately than it could be written out in detail. Mrs. More would be pleased to have so distinguished and able a gentleman as Colonel Albright for a son-in-law, and the revelation of this fact made the daughter very happy.

There! Her quick ear detected foot-falls on the walk. The rap on the door would be made in a moment. No! Well, gracious alive, is he coming round to the kitchen? This is no place to receive him, and no place for him to come.

The man you are thinking of, my girl, is not coming, but another is. It is old Peter Sked, Mrs. Dundren's eccentric cousin, and a remote connection, by blood or marriage, of widow More.

"Eh, Sally," said the old man, as he came forward, "busy at work; always busy. That's right; that's right."

"Uncle Peter," it was uncle simply by courtesy, "you take me by surprise. Lilian, bring out a chair for Uncle Peter."

Lilian, nodding respectfully to Peter, went into the house for a chair.

"Too much finery on that girl, Sally — that's not the way to dress a farmer's daughter. Sheer waste of money, eh?"

"Oh, I think not, Uncle Peter," replied Mrs. More, laughing, "we are not poor, and besides, we have

rich relations. You'll leave Lilian at least half your fortune, and that'll make her rich enough."

"May be I shall, may be I shall — if she's a good girl."

"Where's your sister Alice's son, Uncle Peter — the one who was going to marry Gertrude?"

"I don't know, Sally. I suspect he took after his father and went to the bad. I haven't heard a word about him for years; not a word."

"Your sister Kitty — who married the Scotchman and moved from Cuvier to California, do you ever hear from her?"

"Never; not for twenty years — Dod-blast the Scotchman! I never liked him, Sally, and was glad they went away."

"Well, well, Uncle Peter, I hope Alice's boy is alive and doing well, and that Kitty has children; but if not, you must remember Lilian. She and Helen Dundren are about as near to you as any body except the children of your own sisters."

"Dundren shall never have a dollar of my money, Sally — not a dollar!"

Lilian now returned with the chair. The old man had hardly time to dispose of his umbrella and seat himself when a rap on the front door called her away to welcome and entertain a more interesting visitor.

It was Colonel Albright. On entering the room, and ascertaining they were alone, he took her hand and said:

"My dear Lilian, how well you look. How lovely you always are!"

The girl's head hung like a rose overweighted by dew and sunshine.

"Do you know, my dear, I dream of you by night

and think of you by day? You are never out of my thoughts, and never have been since I met you first on that lucky Sunday morning."

"Oh, Colonel!" exclaimed the blushing girl without daring to lift her eyes. "Is it true? Can it be so?"

The Colonel put his arm about her waist, and drawing her to him said:

"It is; and in proof of it I ask you to be my wife. No man can offer stronger evidence of his love than this."

The Colonel's statement was far from accurate, but the simple girl did not know it. She was in a tumult now; her breath came short and quick, and tears were in her eyes, but they were tears of joy. She had won him and the future was full of splendor. How very thankful she should be for all this happiness. How suddenly it had come, and how differently from what she had expected. Whether she walked or was carried to the little lounge which occupied one corner of the room, she never knew, but she found herself sitting there with the Colonel's arm around her and her head resting on his shoulder. Pretty soon she became aware that he was urging her to fix the day when the marriage ceremony should take place — when he should be the happiest of men; when they would go off together and see something of the great world. There were many sights worth seeing in the large cities. Theaters, museums, music halls, art galleries, and elegant parks — everything in short to delight the eye and satisfy the soul; but even these were as nothing to him — he could forego them all and live happily with her any where, in cabin or wilderness.

After much communing the day was fixed upon, in so far as a dutiful daughter could do it without first

consulting her mother. It was to be ten days hence, if possible. The girl had pleaded for further time to make preparation, but the Colonel urged many good reasons, apparently, for an early marriage.

The reader will say Lilian was weak. True enough; but it was the weakness of youth and inexperience. She knew little of the world; she was honest and sincere herself, and believed others to be the same. She had in her the elements of a noble wife, but she was fluttering now over the infernal pit, ready to drop into such miseries as are only known to the damned. Was it the young girl's fault that she occupied this dangerous position, or the mother's fault, or the fault of the recognized and accepted customs of the country?

After a while when all her doubts and fears had passed away, and been succeeded by the courage which comes of assured victory, Lilian asked the Colonel to excuse her for a moment, and ran to tell her mother what had occurred. She found old Peter Sked in the dining room and her mother busily engaged setting the table for the evening meal. Proceeding to the kitchen she waited there until her mother came out, and then told her hurriedly Colonel Albright had proposed; that she had accepted him, and if there were no objections to it they would be married the coming week. The Colonel had important business demanding his presence in the East, and if his going were delayed it might result in heavy loss, and yet he was resolved not to go unless he could take Lilian with him. The mother was somewhat startled, but she had sense enough to know that great men always have important business, and if Lilian were to marry the Colonel at all, it was proper and right she should not for any trifling con-

sideration require him to make sacrifices, especially pecuniary sacrifices which she supposed in this case they would probably be.

"Yes, yes. If the Colonel thinks it can not be put off, let that day be fixed upon for the wedding; but goodness gracious! how sudden and unexpected it is!"

"Mother, is Peter going to stay for supper?"

"Yes, child; you know he always does."

"I thought may be we ought to ask the Colonel to sup with us."

"So we should; why not?"

"But Peter — what'll he think if he finds Peter here?"

The widow was in doubt for a moment, but finally a happy thought occurred to her.

"I'll have Peter scrub himself, and put on one of your poor father's coats. Tell the Colonel he's an odd sort of a man, but rich and an old acquaintance of the family, who, happening to come along, stopped for supper."

It will be observed that Mrs. More was in some respects a sensible woman. It was certain old Peter would sometime die, and possibly he might remember her in his will. She therefore proposed to treat him well and make him, in outward appearance, at least, a suitable person to be presented to her son-in-law elect.

A half hour later, supper was announced by the tinkling of a bell. The Colonel and Lilian entered the dining room together. Peter was about to take a seat at the table, when Lilian, with some slight embarrassment said:

"Uncle Peter Sked, this is — is — "

"Ginger!" exclaimed Sked savagely. "He's a tramp! What's he doing here? Eh? Damn you, sir, what business have you in a decent woman's house?"

Ginger was somewhat shaken; but strong drink was the only thing that could throw him entirely off his balance, and being sober to-day, he replied with apparent coolness:

"Sir, you are laboring under a grave mistake, and are certainly neither courteous nor complimentary in the matter and manner of your speech."

"Sally," said Sked, glaring fiercely at the Colonel, but talking to the widow, "this man is a scoundrel, and he's here for no good purpose. If you have silverware or money in the house send for a magistrate at once. He's a tramp by profession, and a thief on principle."

"Peter Sked," exclaimed the widow, "you talk like a wild man."

"Sally More," shouted Peter, "you're a fool. This man's face, voice and manner are all familiar to me. He's a common tramp — a low vagabond. If he has not ruined your daughter, he will do it if he can. If he has not already robbed you he will do it unless you call for help. He's here, I tell you, for no good purpose."

"My venerable friend," replied Ginger with dignity, "if your language proceeds from a disordered intellect I should pity you. If from a malicious heart I should — if you were a younger man, chastise you. Being in doubt, and in consideration of your gray hairs, I propose that we act like gentlemen, discuss this question of identity quietly, and permit the ladies to decide between us. If your charges are true I am un-

fit to be here; if false, you are perhaps not a suitable adviser for them."

This was a sensible speech, and went far to re-establish Mrs. More's confidence in the Colonel. Lilian had dropped into a chair, paralyzed by a terrible apprehension that there might be some foundation of truth for Peter Sked's charges, and yet hopeful, nay, trustful there was not, and that they were simply the vagaries of a broken minded and vicious old man.

"You face it out well, eh," retorted Sked. "Now, sir, I have no wish to do you harm, but I have some interest in this family, and don't want the daughter ruined and the mother robbed. The best thing for you to do is to get out. You have no business here."

"Thank you, sir," replied Ginger softly, "I shall go whenever Mrs. More and Miss Lilian request me to do so. I am here as their guest, not yours. I know them. I don't know you, and have no wish to make your acquaintance. Possibly it would be well for you to act upon the advice you have given me, and get out yourself."

"Sally," said Peter, turning to the widow with flashing eyes, "does this tramp rule here? Eh?"

Mrs. More stood silent. If Peter's charges were false the man accused would be her son-in-law; if true, then God help her daughter. She was not ready witted enough to decide on the spur of the moment what answer to make to Sked's question. He therefore turned from her indignantly, and going to the kitchen picked up his hat and umbrella, and left the house.

While the supper was in progress the Colonel exerted himself to the utmost to restore his entertainers to cheerfulness, but found the task a difficult one. Mrs. More was profuse in her excuses for Peter. He

was old and eccentric; it was doubtful if he were always in his right mind. He certainly talked like a crazy man to-day.

The Colonel expressed the belief that Peter had been sincere enough in his accusation. It was simply another case of mistaken identity; such errors were occurring constantly; some of them were exceedingly amusing. He had himself been frequently accosted by strangers who had mistaken him for an old friend, and had, as often, slapped an unknown person familiarly on the back supposing him to be an intimate acquaintance.

While the Colonel was on the alert, filling every moment with agreeable speech, Lilian wondered why he did not say something of his early life. She recollected now that he had not thus far mentioned the place of his birth, nor made any reference to his family. Had the omission been accidental? When supper was over and they were again alone together in the parlor, she would ask him about his parents, his relatives and his home. Henceforth they would be hers as well as his. She had not known him long, and since their acquaintance began he had perhaps been thinking too much of the present to talk of the past. It was, she did not doubt, all right. If he were a common tramp his appearance would indicate it. Mr. Travis would know it; all Cranberry, in fact, would have found it out. Old Peter Sked's statement must be a monstrous and cruel absurdity.

A rap was heard at the front door and Lilian rose from the table to respond to the summons. The visitor was 'Squire Jabez Wharton. He had called to have a little interchange of views with Colonel Albright on the political situation. Peter Sked had stop-

ped at the Wharton homestead and dropped a few words in the 'Squire's ear which filled him with the liveliness of a cricket, and the energy of a lightning rod man. Lilian's heart sank in despair when she invited him to enter, for she knew if the Colonel remained until midnight the 'Squire would stay with him. Lilian was right; the 'Squire had come on purpose to remain, and no amount of shaking would suffice to shake him off. The line fence might come down after all; and the story about the Hebrew Jew would be told if it took all night to tell it.

XIV

AFTERMATH

AT this stage of the canvass in the Cranberry district the candidates may be likened to two men who had run a race through a sewer. They were bespattered from head to foot, dripping with dirty water and reeking with uncleanness. There was not an uncontaminated thread in their clothes, nor an honest and cleanly hair on their heads, nor a spot on their bodies which was not the center of some infectious and deadly poison. Travis was a monster and so was Popper; both had grown rich by robbery; both were liars, thieves, and drunken debauchees, and both were now seeking office solely to enlarge their opportunities for the gratification of their vicious propensities. In short, if the newspapers may be relied upon, both men were better fitted for the penitentiary than for the United States Congress.

It was a close shave between them, and until they neared the end they seemed to be running neck and neck; but Mr. Travis had this advantage, finally, over his competitor. He had had the forethought to obtain a carefully prepared list of the "bummers," "dead beats," and "gutter-snipes" of the district, and on the day preceding the election he placed one thousand new and crisp one dollar treasury notes in the hands of his agents to be discreetly used on the morning of election day to buy up voters who had the honor to be enrolled among the purchasable. This shrewd, but honest, de-

vice enabled him to reach the goal about a half length ahead of the panting and eager Popper. It was a magnificent triumph for the Democrats, and a striking exhibition of the capacity of a free people for self government. The pious Ebenezer congratulated Mr. Travis in person, and then sent a letter of condolence to Popper. The sympathetic chord in Ebenezer's bosom was like the harp on the willow, responsive to the touch of every passing zephyr. He could rejoice with those who rejoiced, and mourn with those who mourned. He was also able to demonstrate that if it had not been for his efforts Travis would have been defeated; and then again he was prepared to prove by the same figures that if he had not ridden the county night and day Popper's vote would have been some hundreds smaller than it was; and then again he was able by the same statistics to satisfy his prohibition friends that they were increasing in strength and usefulness, and if they kept up the warfare against ungodliness, the time would soon come when they would hold the balance of power and dictate to the sinners on all sides of them, whatever terms they pleased. Figures never lie, but in this respect they bear no resemblance whatever to Ebenezer.

On the day succeeding the election, Mr. Travis was the great man of the Cranberry district. He had been vindicated and thoroughly cleansed by victory, and would soon be clothed with the honors of office and be in receipt of its emoluments. People saw many good traits in him now which they had never observed before. He was an exceedingly generous man, but modest, and hence dispensed his charity unostentatiously — and generally to those who served him. This after all was the proper method. Let not thy left hand

know what thy right hand doeth. He was a broad minded, liberal statesman. Some telling sentences which he had cribbed from Jefferson to adorn his campaign speeches, were conclusive proof of this. He was a genial and courteous gentleman, not too proud with all his honors glowing freshly on him, to shake hands with his neighbors, and make kindly enquiries about their families.

"The baby's doin' finely, thank you, Mr. Travis, an' Matilda Jane is a takin' of her panada regular, an' will be glad ter know you ast about her, sir."

Having emerged from the uncertainties of a political campaign and attained the goal of his ambition, Mr. Travis, in the opinion of the people, was entirely satisfied and happy. But this popular estimate of his spiritual condition should not be accepted as wholly accurate. Victories, whether political or military, are often only a little less disastrous than defeats. In reviewing the occurrences of the past three months there were some things he could not contemplate with complacency. He had resorted to many dishonest devices in order to achieve success, but disreputable methods had long since ceased to awaken in him sharp compunctions of conscience or bitter feelings of regret. What rendered him uncomfortable at present was the enormous pecuniary cost of the struggle through which he had passed. He had already expended treble the sum covered by his original estimates, and there were still outstanding a multitude of claims, the payment of which it was impossible to avoid without incurring the hostility of influential party leaders and subjecting himself to the charge of meanness and ingratitude. Committees were sending in bills for extraordinary but, as they asserted, necessary expenditures made in

his interest. Individuals were presenting claims for special services, rendered in accordance with what they assumed to be the candidate's directions, either expressed or implied. Livery men were deluging him with itemized statements of accounts for carriages supplied to speakers and confidential agents. Newspaper proprietors were asking payment for what purported to be editorials published either at his request or that of his authorized managers. Humane people were besieging him for subscriptions to church or charity. Public spirited gentlemen insisted that he should now join them in their favorite enterprises. "Dead beats" thronged his office to remind him of their services and demand a loan. In brief, he felt that he had been elected to distribute what money he possessed and all he could beg, borrow, or steal, and was expected to do it without a moment of unnecessary delay. When he thought of the great pile of unliquidated bills before him and of the continuous stream of personal applications for assistance, he wished from the bottom of his heart his interest enemy had been the candidate instead of himself. But what, under the circumstances, could he do? They had all labored zealously for his success. From some of them — he could not recollect how many, he had solicited help. To others he had expressed a hope that he might have an opportunity to reward them for their activity in his behalf. They had, as they thought, made him a great man who would soon be in receipt of a munificent salary. In detail, their demands were comparatively small. He could not, therefore, in the flush of victory with a good grace decline to justify their high estimate of him, and yet his fortune was wasting at a thousand spigots, and

in the mental panic which for the time seized him, he felt that he was going to bankruptcy on the run.

While in this unhappy frame of mind, he came so near forgetting the dignity of his position as to seriously meditate the forcible ejection from his office of two "gutter-snipes" who had called to boast of their political influence and ask for small accommodations. On further consideration, however, a better method of relief occurred to him. Taking a light overcoat from a closet and putting on his hat he told his visitors he had important business to attend to, and hurriedly left the room. When he reached the sidewalk he was undecided as to the direction he should take, but this was immaterial so it enabled him to avoid further annoyance. As he walked rapidly down the street the thought occurred to him that it would be well to go to the country. By doing this he would at least escape the continuous chatter about the election and what people had done to insure his success. Stopping, therefore, at a livery stable he ordered a team, and while standing at the door waiting for it, was accosted by one of his political friends.

"How air yez, Misther Travis; an' it's glad I am ye was elected, sor. I niver worricked in me loife as I did that day fer ye'r honor, sor. There were tin min a boardin' wid me at Widdy McGafferty's — tin, sor, an' sez I, b'ys let's be afther givin' Misther Travis a lift, an' yez got ivery wote, ye'r honor, ivery wote, sor."

"Thank you, Tim; I thought you'd stand by me."

"An' sure I wad, sor, tooth and toe nail, fer yez, sor. I made yez not less nor tin honest wotes, yer honor. Yez may allers know whar to foin' Tim O'Rourke. He's a thrue Dimmycrat an' niver

scratches the ticket loike some folks, sor — wad yer honor be so kin' as to lind a poor man a foive dollar note till next wake a Chuesday? I'll pay it back to yez prompt on the day — foive dollars; an' sure it's nothin' to the loikes o' yez. Yer a great an' rich man, yer honor, an' ud niver feel it if yez suld niver see it agin."

"I haven't that much with me, Tim — here — here's a dollar for you; I'm in a hurry — Damn that boy, why don't he fetch the team!"

"Thank ye, Misther Travis; yez can hand me the other four ter morrer, if ye's a moind to, sor. An' shure foive dollars is nothin' to the loikes o' yez — I made yez tin honest wotes, Misther Travis; tin sor —"

Mr. Travis turned on his heel impatiently and shouted into the stable door:

"Bring out that team — hurry up!"

"Be thar in a minute, sah; mos' ready, sah."

A shabby genteelman coming up now laid his hand on Mr. Travis' shoulder to attract his attention from the stable boy, and said:

"Not going away?"

"I've business in the country, and must be off at once — I should have gone an hour ago."

"I shall not detain you. My business was neglected during the canvass and I am short. Here's a note to the bank for a hundred; lend me your name for sixty days."

"I don't do that sort of thing, Filkins, really my good fellow, I never endorse for any body."

"It's simply a matter of form, man; I've spent more than a hundred for you in time and money within the month — step into the office and write your name.

One good turn deserves another; live and let live's a good maxim."

"Well, well, I'll do it for you, Filkins, but it's against the rule of my life."

Going into a little office which occupied one corner of the stable Mr. Travis signed the note, and handing it back, said:

"How's your family, Filkins?"

"Well; much obliged; good morning."

"Hurry up with that team, you black sun of a gun. I can't wait all day. Do you hear?"

"I's comin', sah; hosses jus' ready to buckle to, sah. Be dar 'fore yer knows it, sah."

When after a little further delay the team was led out, the hostler said to Mr. Travis, with a broad grin:

"Boss, yer couldn't gib a nigga a nickle to buy a glass of beer, sah?"

"Not a cent," said Travis, angrily.

"Dat was my 'pinion, boss. Dat's jus' wat I sed, sah."

"What do you mean, you rascal?"

"I sed dat yer couldn't, sah, an' yo' sed yer couldn't, sah, an' so we 'greed on dat pint jus' like we b'longed to same party, sah—"

Travis had by this time taken his seat in the buggy —"When folks 'gree 'bout de same pint, sah, dar's nebber no 'casion fer hard feelin's, sah."

"Here's a quarter for you," said Mr. Travis, as he was driving off; "catch it!"

The hostler picked the money up and chuckling over his good fortune, said:

"'Pears dat we was bofe wrong. I sed he couldn't, he sed he couldn't, and den he gone and done it. Hit's jus' de way wid dem durned copperhead Dim'crats.

Dey nebber do wat dey say dey will—nebber. Hit's a c'lar case. Dey're de bigges' liars on de topside de yearth."

The bracing air and pleasant sunshine of an October afternoon had a tendency to revive Mr. Travis' drooping spirits. The horses were rapid goers, and as he bowled along over the smooth clay road his thoughts were lifted from the disagreeable groove in which they had been running, and it seemed as if a better world were opening out before him. He was indeed about to enter upon a new phase of existence. The dry and uninteresting routine of village life would soon be exchanged for a broader and more exciting round of duties. Narrow and homely streets for wide and elegant avenues. The little country court house with its professional jurors and tiresome pleadings, for the National capitol with its brilliant speeches and appreciative listeners. His victory was worth something after all — worth probably all it cost. Having won it might he not with confidence seek to achieve another? The other to which he now looked forward would not only give him the loveliest and most amiable of wives, but more than make good pecuniarily all the losses he had sustained. A life of celibacy was at best barren and unsatisfactory. No home, no children, none to perpetuate the name, and none to inherit what might be left. It was a man's duty to marry. Mr. Travis had been aware of this for years, but never so keenly as now.

When he drove up to Dundren's gate he was received, after a fashion, by two playful dogs, with sonorous voices, who sometimes pretended to be very fierce, but unconsciously let every body know by the wagging

of their tails that their ferocity was assumed and therefore not dangerous.

"Toby! Punch!"

It was the voice of their mistress admonishing them to be quiet, and at the sound of it they went regretfully back to the house as if called from the agreeable duty of rending Mr. Travis into a thousand fragments, and distributing his remains broadcast over the farm. Gertrude put her hands on their heads when they returned to her, to indicate that she was pleased to find them obedient and merciful, and then proceeded down the graveled walk to meet her visitor and congratulate him on his election.

"Thank you; but don't say a word more about it. I've heard of nothing else for days. I'm out for a ride; go with me."

"Not a long one?"

"Short or long, as you wish. I've run away from a hundred petty annoyances, and should prefer never to return."

"Well, if you have been driven here it may be my duty to make you glad to get home —"

Toby and Punch were never more eager to take a little exercise than on this occasion, and circled round and round the carriage when it started in doubt as to the exact wishes of their mistress, but finally concluding she would not positively decline their protection and guidance, they went scurrying down the road in advance of the team as if running a race in which the winner was to have five pounds — of good, tender beefsteak, and no bone.

The carriage turned off the Cranberry road on to one leading in a northeasterly direction along the margin of a brook, and after perhaps an hour Toby and

Punch discovered a pedestrian in the distance and straightway bore down upon him with great speed, and when they reached the enemy they cavorted about him and barked loudly and made furious sallies at his shins and seemed to say, ha! you old rascallion we've got you now! and then the beleagured pedestrian, assuming a defensive attitude drew an old cotton umbrella and waved it threateningly, and finally aimed a vicious blow at Toby which he evaded by a marvelous leap; but nothing daunted, and warmly supported by the faithful Punch, he rallied again and made another bold charge on the foe, but like a prudent warrior, halted just before he got within reach of the enemy's weapon, wheeled, retired, and came on again, and finally, by a quick maneuver got in the enemy's rear and compelled him to change front, and so the battle progressed until the buggy came near enough to enable Gertrude to interfere in the interest of peace.

"Down Toby! Out Punch! Oh, you mischievous dogs."

Obedient to the commands of their mistress the jolly dogs abandoned the game at once, and went galloping down the road in search of other adventures.

Sked was too busy condemning all dogs to eternal condemnation to observe and recognize the occupants of the carriage.

"They drive a good team, dod-blast 'em, but they'll may be see the time when they'll wish they had gone afoot, and kept fewer dogs."

Let us hope not, Sked. It would do you no harm to wish them well. Indeed, it might do that stony heart of yours much good to grow soft enough to give cordial greeting to those you meet. If there be a future for the human soul the time is near when the

kindly thoughts and esteem of others will be precious to you. What music it would be to the listening spirit to hear people say:

"How generous and gentle old Peter was, and how attentive to the wants of those around him. His kindness to others made him happy, and the recollection of his good deeds makes our lives more cheerful."

"But suppose death ends us, egad, of what use then would these good thoughts be?"

"If death means annihilation, Sked, of what use is gold and all your pinchings?"

"I've won the game I played at."

"True, but it was a poor game at best, and the winnings of no more value to you than dust. Go to, old man! You took the wrong chute in youth, and have done nothing worth the doing. Even Gertrude Frazier's dogs are making better use of their advantages, are happier in life and will be more regretted by good folks when dead."

When on their return, Mr. Travis assisted Gertrude from the carriage at Dundren's gate, the sun had disappeared, and the west was glowing with long yellow and crimson streamers. Was the scene before her suggestive of that brilliant life of gaiety and fashion to which she had been invited?

In the evening Mrs. Dundren and Gertrude were sitting on opposite sides of a little table busy with needle work and so thoroughly occupied by their own thoughts that the silence had for some time remained unbroken. Married women have the sense to discern many things invisible to mortals of less experience, and at length, as if referring to a question which Gertrude was silently discussing, Mrs Dundren said:

"Pardon me — you should accept."

Looking up with a smile and heightened color Gertrude answered:

"I don't know."

A long silence ensued, but Mrs. Drunden had not abandoned the subject.

"He's wealthy, the foremost gentleman of the County; I can see many things in the new life which I think would be attractive to you."

To this there was no reply, and after a long pause Mrs. Dundren continued:

"If Robert were living and faithful you would have heard from him."

Gertrude's head bent still closer to her work; the ruddy tinge disappeared from her cheeks, and her voice trembled as she answered:

"It would seem so."

XV

KITTY ROSS

DOUGALD, Gertrude Frazier's eldest brother, was an invalid, Malcolm, the next in birth, was sleeping comfortably in his grave on Sand Ridge, sent thither by strong drink some forty years sooner than nature intended him to go, and if the thrifty farmers of Cranberry thought of Archie, the youngest, at all, they probably thought of him as one who was by this time similarly settled. But notwithstanding any cunning speculations as to his fate which may have been entertained by his old neighbors, Archie was still above ground and likely to remain there for some time to come. The fact is, after years of idleness, debauchery and wandering, he had been brought to a full halt on the golden shores of the Pacific. His little stock of money was gone, his health broken, his constitution shattered, and while in this condition the very devil got hold of him, and kicked him hither and yon, and dragged him through sewers of vileness, and buffeted him to such an extent that there was scarcely anything of the man left. Weak of body, imbecile of mind, homeless, penniless and utterly wretched—a mere rag of humanity, indeed, he ceased to afford even his satanic majesty amusement, and so after getting him kicked out of a low dive, and seeing him nicely located on the curbstone with a battered face and broken rib, the fiend turned from his victim to attend to more important business, thinking, doubtless, if

there was anything still left in Archie Frazier worth shaking, he could return at his own convenience and rattle him again. But when the fiend's back was turned, and while Archie lay unconscious, an ambulance was driven up and what little remalned of him was flung into it and carted off to the hospital. And so through a broken rib, a bruised face, and an unconscious brain he escaped from satan and fell into the hands of the Sisters of Charity.

I shall not stop to tell you just how Archie demeaned himself during the days which immediately followed. How often he cried out that he was dying of thirst and must have whiskey; nor how he abused and slandered the patient white-hooded nurse who had him in charge. The poor fellow was delirious, and if the fiend had been standing by the sick man's bedside he would have laughed outright and flourished his tail in triumph at Archie's wild speeches and profane words; but happily the gentle faced woman who waited on the suffering sinner was very watchful and tender, and with perhaps a tear, much fingering of her rosary, and moving of thin white lips in prayer, she made it impossible for satan to approach her patient.

After many days Archie awoke in his right mind, and was surprised to find himself between clean sheets and in a comfortable room, and was furthermore astonished to behold two sympathizing blue eyes looking tenderly into his. There was still a craving within him for something he did not see, and now hardly dared to ask for; but finally the desire augmented and became so persistent that he ventured in the gentlest of tones to say:

"My good woman, couldn't you give me a little whiskey — just a drop?"

Satan's enemy smiled, then turned to a small stove on which some broth or gruel was kept warm, and putting a few mouthfuls of food in a bowl, added to it the least mite of whiskey, and then fed it to him. This afforded such temporary relief to the sufferer that his attention was diverted from his stomach to the fractured rib.

Finally, after some months of severe distress during which his gentle nurse was unwearying in her devotion, and constant in her admonitions, Archie's craving for strong drink disappeared so far as to afford him an opportunity to think continuously of other things, of better things, of the miserable and shameful life he had led, of the good mother and father who were sleeping on Sand Ridge; of the devil's own time he'd had of it thus far in life, and then he resolved that he would do better. Oh, he had abundant time to think and resolve, for after he had so far recovered as to leave his bed there were weeks of feebleness and weariness, in which there were many fearful twitches of the muscles, and heavy blows of the re-awakened conscience to remind him of his years of illness, dissipation, and sin. But he was thoroughly sober now, and help him God, he would keep so to the end. Yes, there was a God! He had never realized this truth so forcibly as since he had seen these patient, self-sacrificing women, bend unexplainingly, and unremittingly, and without visible reward, to their work of mercy.

After awhile he was able to take little strolls about the city. He could pass a grog shop now without longing to go in. This was a hopeful sign and made him confident the future would be an improvement on the past. Then he began to do odd chores for the sto-

ters, and then to go out and work a little, still making the hospital his home. In time, when health was fully restored, he obtained a position as porter in a railway office, bade his benefactresses good bye, and commenced his new life in earnest. He was a man of gentlemanly instincts, good address and sprightly intellect. Such men do not go long unobserved in a new country where changes occur rapidly and new enterprises and increasing business demand additional helpers. In the course of a few years Frazier was promoted from one position to another until he finally became the best car man of the Union Pacific Railway. He was on business connected with the road when he met Robert Brett in the depot at Chicago. His mission was too urgent then to admit of a visit to Cranberry, but he did not care any way to return to his old home until he had accomplished something in life. The future looked fair to him. He entertained no hope of acquiring great wealth, but a modest competency he felt quite sure was within his reach; and it is probable he would have achieved it but for an incident which will now be chronicled.

While looking up and down the land for lost, strayed, or disabled cars — cars needlessly detained at unimportant stations or side-tracked with many others of various roads, and hence unemployed—he ran across old John Ross, of San Francisco, a master builder of the Union Pacific Railway; and when this venerable mechanic ascertained that Archie's family name was Frazier, he looked him over kindly with his gray, deep-set eyes, and then asked if he were of Scottish descent. Being answered in the affirmative, he made further inquiry and, to his great joy, found Archie was a Lanarkshire Frazier. Having known the Scottish branch

of the family well in his boyhood, and being fond of talking of his early days, and reviving old memories, he made Archie promise to call at his home on the coming Tuesday, when they would both be in San Francisco, and take dinner with him.

When Tuesday came Archie took a street car and went out to John Ross's comfortable residence, and was received with great cordiality, and while the master builder was talking about Lanarkshire and his young days and old neighbors, and dwelling with special emphasis on the respectability of the Fraziers, his daughter Kitty entered the room, and with a becoming blush mantling her round cheeks, was introduced to Archie.

This young lady was the picture of innocence, health and beauty, but alas! she was as obstinate as a spoiled child, and as likely to have her own way in everything upon which she set her heart, as any only heir of a fond father ever was. And before the dinner was fairly over she made up her mind she would have that lost car man, or perish in the attempt. No one, to look at her, would have suspected this blushing, round-cheeked and brown-eyed young damsel of entertaining any such diabolical scheme for the enslavement of man; but appearances, as we know, are often deceptive, and they were never more so than in this particular case.

From this day on, her subtle brain was constantly working toward the end suggested, and her honest father aided unwittingly in the execution of her plans. Invitations to dine went frequently to the unsuspecting victim, and the cunning minx played her little game so well that before the poor lost car man was at

all conscious of his peril, he was too far gone to be saved, and popped the question so plump and fair that Kitty Ross attempted to faint and drop into his arms. She was too healthy a girl, however, to execute the first part of this maneuver naturally, but she did succeed in the second, and Archie, losing his good sense temporarily, gave to his fair conqueror what seemed to the common understanding, a series of old fashioned hugs, such as our ancestors used to indulge in, but which, in these latter and better days have become almost wholly obsolete. In brief, the man was so bewitched by this imp of furbelows, bangs, ribbons and roses, he seemed totally unaware that he was as badly lost as any car he ever hunted for.

When the honest old master builder ascertained what Kitty was up to, and that he was now likely to have two children; instead of lifting the roof off of his house by a cyclone of indignation, as any sensible father would have done, he simply patted his daughter on the cheek, affectionately, and said:

"I think ye ha' doon weel, my bairn. Thae mon cooms o' a gude family."

Two months after the first kiss was given, Archibald Frazier was married to Katherine Ross, and old John Ross had so much confidence in his son-in-law, he gave a business block in San Francisco to his son-in-law's wife, with a provision in the deed that at her death it should descend to the heirs of her body. With an income of ten thousand a year at her disposal, Mrs. Kitty now picked up the man she had captured, and carried him off in triumph on a wedding tour.

As the old master builder stood in the doorway of his comfortable home with moist eyes on the day of their departure, he said to them in tremulous tones:

"If ye gang sae far as Lanarkshire, speer oot Jem Scobie tat keeps thae ale house in Dungleton, an' gie him a five pun note ta wet thae wheestles o' my ole neebors wi'. Min' ye, Kitty, they're mos'ly pore folk tat knew me i' thae ole time; treat 'em kin'ly, lass, treat 'em kin'ly."

"Never fear, father," Kitty replied, as she put her arms around the old man's neck and kissed him; "we'll have all Dungleton to dinner, and when the health of John Ross is proposed, Archie shall respond so eloquently, Dungleton will shout itself hoarse in honor of her absent son. Oh, we'll treat 'em well!"

And so it happened that on an October morning, as Archie Frazier and his wife were going eastward, they got off the train at Cranberry station. It would be difficult to describe Mrs. Kitty's elegant traveling dress, and if it were described, readers a thousand years hence might smile at what their deteriorated tastes conceived to be the ridiculousness of her costume and might even go so far as to question the veracity of the historian. Let it content the present generation, therefore, to know that Mrs. Kitty Frazier was no whit behind the times either in the material or fashion of her apparel. Her husband, too, was the well attired, alert man of business, who speaks authoritatively, acts decisively, and wastes no time on inconsequential things. Those who knew him once as a rollicking blade, often wholly drunk, and never entirely sober, had to look twice, and then be called by name before they could believe he was a phase of the man they knew. What a contrast he was, indeed, to the former Archie! This Archie might be a millionaire, a senator, anything within the reach of man. The other was a worthless profligate and spendthrift. This one bore

himself with dignity, spoke in gentle but decisive tones; the other was a staggering, ill-tempered brawler. "Well, well, so this is Archie, old Dougald Frazier's son, we never thought he'd turn out like this — never." And he never would, my friends, if he had not turned whiskey out and come down to inexpensive habits, plain living, and wholesome food. Yes, there was still something more than this needed to make him what he is, to-wit: the thinking of good thoughts, and the looking up to heaven, instead of thinking bad thoughts, and looking down to hell.

Archie was a no greater surprise to others than to himself. We rarely know what good metal there is in men until it is hammered over and over, then we often find that what we at first took for brass is pure gold. Sometimes this discovery is made quite late in life, and very often men are knocked about for years and almost killed before it is ascertained. A hot fire and many heavy blows are required to convert the rough iron ore into a keen blade; and so of God's hammering, it is always for good ends, and it is not His fault if the material does not come out of the forge a thing of utility and beauty.

It was soon known to all Cranberry that Archie Frazier had returned, bringing with him a handsome wife, and that he seemed sober, rich, prosperous and happy. Nobody could understand how all this had come about, and to none was the mystery more insoluble than to the few blear-eyed, ragged and limp human wrecks, who, in the old time had been his boon companions. How shame-faced and uneasy they were in his presence. How suggestive he was of what they might have been. Alas! their own hearts told them what they were. He had been rising; they had been

falling. He had years of plenty and happiness before him; they had nothing but pinchings and wretchedness. Is it too late to make the change he made? No, not too late; it is never too late to seek to do better, but it takes a strong will to sever the old ties and conquer the old appetites. For the weak and irresolute fool there is no hope; but victory is always within reach of the brave and determined.

A pair of handsome bays attached to an open carriage, dashing around the corner, now halted in front of the Cranberry hotel. Mrs. Kitty came tripping down from the room where she had re-arranged her toilet, with her bangs in order, her back hair nicely dressed, and her cheeks glowing; stepping out on the pavement she was about to be assisted into the vehicle by her husband, when a hearty slap on his shoulder made him turn round. There, with hand extended, and a smile all over his broad face, stood Ben Hood.

"Why, Ben," exclaimed Archie, "I'm glad to see you. Kitty — my wife, Mr. Hood."

Mrs. Kitty put her little plump, cool gloved hand into Ben Hood's great fist. It was a nice kind of hand, such a hand, in brief, as an able bodied young man might hold all day, without getting at all tired, and Ben Hood shook it and then shook her husband's, and then expressed the pleasure he felt in meeting them, and the hope that they would drive out and dine with him at an early day, and bring Gertrude, and Dougald with them. The Fraziers and Hoods had been neighbors for many a year. Their farms were not far apart, and Ben Hood had known Archie when the latter was a toddling boy.

While they were talking of old times and mutual acquaintances the village people gathered around and

shook hands with Archie, while others gazed admiringly on Kitty. The belief was general that Archie had "struck it rich" on the golden shores of the Pacific, and then had married the only daughter of a bonanza king, and that he and Her Royal Highness, the Princess, having grown weary of palatial halls, and the pomp and ceremony thereof, were taking in the rougher phases of life, just for the fun of the thing, you know, and not because they had to. This theory was good enough, as nearly true as such imaginings generally are, and would have suited Kitty to a dot. The fact is, the master builder's handsome daughter was never happier than now. This thing of being a married woman was no great hardship after all. Oh, she could shoulder its responsibilities! Nobody need have any misgivings on that score — not at all.

Pretty soon they bade that crochety and most unreasonable of men, Ben Hood, good morning, and went bowling over a smooth, clay road towards Dundren's. If the driver of the rapid going bays had had eyes in the back of his head he would have been astonished, and perhaps shocked, to find the princess winking at her husband and going so far in this play of the eyes as to assume the appearance of a cross-eyed woman, and then he would have been dumbfounded to see the faces she made, and to hear the little snatches of song she hummed softly, and to see the way she caught her husband's index finger and doubled it up to make him tell whom he loved best. In short, there was much behavior of this sort most unbecoming a lady who had the reputation in Cranberry of being the daughter of a bonanza king.

The distance from Cranberry to Cherry Farm, to

a newly married couple on a pleasant October day, is quite short, so short, indeed, that when the carriage came to a full halt at Dundren's gate, Mrs. Kitty was greatly surprised, and insisted the place they had started for was still miles away.

Archie sounded the knocker on Dundren's door, and pretty soon it was opened by a little maiden whose big blue eyes doubled in size when she saw Kitty.

"Is Mr. Dundren at home?" he asked.

"He's on the farm, some where, sir — not in the house. I think if we'd ring the bell he'd come in."

"Mrs. Dundren and Miss Frazier?"

"Oh, yes, sir; will you please come in? I — I — almost forgot to ask you to come in — walk into this room. I'll tell mamma and cousin Gertrude.

Having shown the callers into the best room and asked them to be seated, Mrs. Dundren's youngest daughter ran off to tell her mother and cousin there was the loveliest lady in the parlor she ever set eyes on. Such a bonnet! such splendid back hair! such eyes! such an elegant dress! Gracious, but she's nice. And so she is, my child. Mrs. Kitty Frazier is all your fancy paints her, and a little more. While your back is turned this lively young wife is, by queer devices and strange antics, trying to provoke her husband to kiss her, and the poor man, driven to desperation, finally does as she wishes. But now, hearing footfalls in the hall, there is a sudden change in her appearance and demeanor. She becomes at once the pink of propriety and the picture of demureness!

Gertrude Frazier entered the room expecting to meet people from Cranberry, or possibly from a more distant town. May be a call of inquiry; possibly somebody to look over the farm with a view to purchasing

it. Archie and his wife rose to meet her; she was quite sure she had never seen them before, and yet there was something in the face and bearing of the gentleman not wholly strange.

"Good morning," she said.

The gentleman looked at her steadily with the faintest suggestion of a smile flickering on his face, but made no response, and so Gertrude with a little flush mantling her fair face, turned to the lady and said:

"Mrs. Dundren will be here in a moment; please be seated."

Finding himself unrecognized, Archie said:

"Gertrude, this is Kitty, my wife. Don't you know me, sister?"

"Oh! Archie, Archie," she cried, and in an instant her arms were about his neck, and she was sobbing with thankfulness and joy. When she had in some measure recovered from the first shock of surprise, she turned and embraced his wife, but could hardly trust her senses even then, and so holding a hand of each stood looking at them with tears streaming down her face.

In the afternoon, while Kitty and the younger members of Mr. Dundren's family were out among the barns and sheds inspecting the cows, calves and sheep, Archie and Gertrude were standing together on the lawn.

"I fear I assisted in doing you a great injury, sister," he said regretfully.

"Why do you think so, Archie?"

"Have you ever seen Robert or heard from him since —"

She looked up with reddening face and answered:

"No."

"Your estimate of him was more accurate than mine."

"What do you know of him?"

"Not much. I met him at Chicago, three years ago."

"He is still living, then?"

"At that date, certainly. He impressed me as being a man of good character, good habits, and great ability. He is evidently one whom any woman might be proud of as a husband."

"Does he reside in Chicago?"

"I do not know. I met him accidentally at the station, and had barely time to ask his forgiveness."

"Did he make no allusion to the past?"

"He asked if I had heard from Cranberry recently; but I had not and so told him. I am quite sure we did you a great wrong."

"Perhaps not — possibly it was well for him and for me. We were young then. He is probably married and settled now. I should have heard from him if he had not been. Heaven only knows what happenings are for the best. I am glad you think well of him."

When, in the evening, Gertrude retired to her room she did not at once seek repose. Her thoughts were busy with the communication Archie had made respecting Robert. Her faith in his fidelity up to this hour had continued unshaken. Even Mrs. Dundren's suggestion of a day or two ago had failed to excite a suspicion as to his constancy. She thought she knew him well — better than any body else; and even now, after Archie had assured her he was living, and apparently in independent circumstances, she found it

difficult to believe he had been recreant to their mutual pledge.

For ten years, she had to all intents and purposes, considered herself a married woman; not free to think of another alliance even if inclined to do so. His prolonged silence was a grievous mystery to her, still she knew how proud he was and attributed it to a sentiment of delicacy growing out of the inequality of their fortunes. Indeed, she recollected only too keenly how her brothers had taunted him with his poverty, and accused him of a desire to enrich himself by marriage. She had concluded, therefore, that when he succeeded in winning a modest competency, he would come back again. What she had herself written to him in the excitement and terror of the day when they were together last, she did not know; but she felt quite sure nothing had passed between them to indicate a desire for final separation. The predominating thought with her on that occasion had been fear for his personal safety. He was eager and resolute enough then, and not easily deterred from the execution of a purpose upon which he had set his heart. What had since occurred to effect a change in him? Had he met one who suited his fancy better? Had his larger experience obliterated the impression of a youthful attachment? Had he become absorbed in money making and oblivious to other things? Chicago is but twelve hours, by rail, from Cranberry — simply a day or night's journey. If he had taken the trouble to make inquiry he must know she was still unmarried. She had been ten long years in making the discovery that the man she trusted was unfaithful to her. Henceforth her thoughts must find new channels. Does he fancy she has been rendered unhappy and perhaps inconsol-

able by his desertion? Has it been manly of him to treat her so? Does he forget she accepted him without thought of his poverty? Does the fact that she has adhered to him so long gratify his vanity and lead him to conclude that he is superior to other men?

There were at first tears in Gertrude's handsome eyes and keen sorrow at her heart; but the tears were brushed away impatiently, and anger bid fair to overwhelm her sorrow. As she cast about in her own mind for some opportunity to assert herself and show indifference to the false lover who might be drawing some measure of satisfaction from a belief in her fealty to him, she thought of Mr. Travis. She did not love him, but she could make him a faithful wife. Her marriage to him would not pass unnoticed by the world at large. A life in Washington would bring her in contact with many interesting people. It was something to be the wife of a congressman, and to be privileged to attend the brilliant receptions at the Capital. It may be after all, Robert Brett would not long have occasion to flatter himself that she had lost so very much in losing him.

XVI

JACK WHARTON

WHILE the good people of Cranberry town had been absorbed in speculation as to the result of the election, and later still while the personal friends of Mr. Travis were rejoicing over his success and discussing interesting incidents of the campaign, quiet preparation was being made at Mrs. More's cottage for Lilian's wedding. The statement of Colonel Allright as to his home and family had been accepted in full faith by those most interested in the matter. The accusations of Peter Sked, being now regarded as simply the vagaries of an unbalanced mind, Lilian and her mother were disposed to reproach themselves for having been disturbed by them in the least. Here, they had unconsciously argued, was a young and handsome man associating with the best people of the county, making eloquent speeches to large audiences, holding a place in public estimation second only to the candidates themselves. The idea that there could be anything in the previous life of such a gentleman of which his friends need be ashamed was simply preposterous. Men of sullied reputations did not thrust themselves into the eye of the world by flaming placards, and live on intimate terms with prominent statesmen. On the contrary, they naturally sought obscurity and endeavored to steal through life unobserved. Nevertheless the Colonel was still the Prince More, tender and condescending indeed than Lilian's

earlier dreams had pictured him. With his Royal Highness it was her glorious destiny to walk hand in hand beside still waters and in perpetual sunshine. At thought of the delightful prospect the pulsations of her young heart quickened, her blood thrilled pleasantly, and her cheeks assumed the tint of the moss rose.

If poor Jack Wharton could see her now while she is making preparation for this royal journey, he would be amazed by her loveliness. Nothing so beautifies humanity as love. At its touch, hard lines disappear, the flesh softens, the eyes brighten, the face glows and the step becomes elastic. It renders the homely handsome, the handsome beautiful, and the beautiful angelic, and for them the world becomes a paradise where the soul finding all it longs for, is never weary and always happy.

Lilian was at her mother's gate looking westward. The sun was setting and the great bank of clouds away off beyond Cranberry showed peaks of crimson, flakes of gold and large areas of fleecy whiteness. The sky never appeared so beautiful to her before; but gorgeous as the sunset was it did not wholly occupy her thoughts; she was thinking also of the Prince, and almost expected to see him step out of the clouds arrayed in purple and spangles to greet her as the Queen of his heart.

The Colonel had been absent for a few days. He would return that evening; to-morrow was the day fixed upon for the marriage and their departure. While Lilian, occupied by her own pleasant thoughts, was looking dreamily towards the village, Jack Wharton, coming from the opposite direction, stopped and startled her by saying abruptly, and with downcast look:

"Lilly, I want to tell you something, and — and — am afraid may be I oughtn't to — the fact is, I don't know what to do about it."

Jack was evidently in earnest. Lilian looked at the embarrassed and awkward young man for a moment soberly enough, and then her fair face lighted up, and with a little laugh she answered softly:

"Don't do anything, Jack — I think that is best when one's in doubt."

"May be — I wish I knew, for Lilly, it concerns you much."

The girl was quite sure now she had correctly guessed the purpose of Jack's visit. She had once thought of him as a lover, but that was long ago, certainly never since the lucky hour when she first met the Prince. As the awkward country boy stood before her, downcast and ill at ease, she could not help contrasting him with the self-asserting and confident man she proposed to marry, and congratulating herself on her great good fortune. She did not doubt that Jack was about to propose, and was somewhat interested to know just how the bashful fellow would succeed in making the avowal, but she replied to him by saying:

"If the subject is disagreeable to you, Jack, let it pass — for the present, at least. Your folks are all well, I hope?"

He took no notice of her inquiry, but stood looking at her with an expression of anxiety and doubt.

"Lilly," he said, "I wish somebody else would do what — "

Lilian now laughed outright, and said quickly:

"May be somebody else has."

Jack Wharton's face brightened in an instant and he replied:

"If so, Lilly, it's all right — all right. You don't know how the thing has troubled me, and how doubtful I was as to what to do, and how you'd take it, but I thought if certain reports were true you should know it, and while the information might be disagreeable to you it would be less so than what might follow if you didn't know it. I thought, you see, it wasn't known to anybody much as yet. Indeed, I thought I'd got onto it accidentally myself, but I'm glad to find you're ahead of me, and it don't annoy you, and the reports about the marriage are false, and you don't care for him."

The girl had grown deathly pale during this long speech; at its conclusion she cried with a quavering voice:

"For mercy's sake, John Wharton, tell me what you mean by all this? What have I to do with the reports you speak of?"

"Why, Lilly," Jack answered softly, "folks said you were about to marry the man Albright."

"And why shouldn't I, if I want to, and he is willing," Lilian retorted angrily.

The light went out of Jack Wharton's face, and he leaned against the fence as if he had suddenly grown weak and perhaps speechless.

Lilian continued:

"Who can say anything against Colonel Albright, a man who did service in the war, and who stands high here and at his own home? Who dare say anything against him or his family? Has that crazy old man Peter Sked been filling your ears with foolish stories? Good evening, John Wharton."

Lilian turned abruptly and haughtily away, but before she had gone far Jack Wharton found his voice and the courage of desperation.

"For goodness sake, Lilly, come back. There must be some terrible mistake. Let us understand each other, at any rate. If I am wrong, I shall be glad of it, for it will be good for you; I hope I am. I have no grudge against Colonel Albright, and no wish to harm him."

The girl returned and standing face to face with Jack Wharton, the fence between them, said with flashing eyes and a voice full of reproachful bitterness:

"Well, what did old Peter say?"

"I don't know; I've not seen him, but two men are in hiding at our house awaiting the Colonel's return on purpose to arrest him."

The girl was trembling now in fear and weakness, her face bloodless; clutching the fence with both hands for support she looked appealingly to Wharton.

"I accidentally found out who they were and why they were in hiding this afternoon — not an hour ago. They say the men known here as Albright and Winship are escaped convicts, for whose recapture a large reward is offered. They intend to seize one of them at your house to-night, then go to Cranberry and take the other. I overheard them talking about the matter with father. One of the detectives is a short, heavy-set fellow, with a brutal face and a stiff leg. I thought you would be hurt to be mixed up in the affair, and so come to tell you. If the Colonel was to escape, few persons would know even that you knew him, and all would conclude the report as to your marriage was idle talk."

Lilian's head dropped until it rested on her hands,

and she was sobbing violently. Feeling that he was in some way the cause of all her trouble, Jack said encouragingly:

"Take heart, Lilly. The detectives may be mistaken in the men."

The suggestion revived her instantly; straightening up she cried:

"They are mistaken!"

"I hope so," replied Jack; "the Colonel will know. If I could see him in time I'd tell him, and if the man we hope he is, he'll stay; if not, he'll may be get away. What shall I do?"

"Do nothing," said the girl firmly. "Do nothing. They are wrong; you are wrong. The men who assume to be detectives may themselves be convicts. They may be trying to deceive your father in order to rob him. He says himself cheats and bad men always call on him before trying any where else. Go home! quick! you may be needed there, and I want to be alone."

The young man did not venture to reply, but turning from her instantly, walked towards his father's house, and soon disappeared in a bend of the road.

Lilian now went in, put on her cloak and hat, and coming out again, set off at a brisk gait toward Cranberry. She must be the first to impart this startling information to the Colonel. She knew the detectives were mistaken; still, if they were to make the arrest it would be the source of annoying gossip, interfere with the wedding, postpone the Colonel's visit East, and so result in loss to him. He had had much to say of important business demanding his attention. It was this which induced her mother to consent to

an immediate marriage. Perhaps the Colonel could at once satisfy the detectives — if indeed they were detectives — that he was not the man they sought. This was a cheering thought. The best thing for him to do was to hasten to 'Squire Wharton's and let them know they had been deceived. He could, if need be, call on Mr. Travis to vouch for him. He could refer them to his rich and well known family in Philadelphia. He could by wire obtain evidence of his good character from his old comrades in arms. He was personally acquainted with General Grant, and had stood side by side with Sheridan in the great battle of Winchester. Indeed, he was on intimate terms with very many of the distinguished soldiers and statesmen of the country, and she could hardly repress a smile when she thought of the great joke he had put on the great Mr. Blaine when they were campaigning together in the State of Maine. Oh, it would be easy enough for the Colonel to prove — but may be after all — the girl staggered under the doubt which for a moment came uppermost in her disturbed mind. But no; it could not be; he would not so deceive her. He could not do it, loving her as he did, and knowing the intensity of her love for him. It may be that Peter Sked had been instrumental in putting the detectives on the Colonel's track. He was a malicious old man, and certainly very angry when he left her mother's house. He would not hesitate to do a wicked act or tell a false story to humiliate and annoy one against whom he had conceived a petty spite. A tramp? what a senseless and crazy whim! Do tramps take part conspicuously in political campaigns? Do they dine with distinguished statesmen? Do they wear swords and epaulettes and spurs in war, and wield great in-

fluence over men in peace? Nonsense! Old Peter's mind was never strong, and latterly he has become a raving maniac. He is to blame for all this. He has been telling false and slanderous stories, but when the detectives, if they should prove to be detectives, are boldly confronted by the Colonel, and discover their mistake they will gladly enough acknowledge themselves in the wrong and humbly sue for pardon.

The night had shut down quickly. When she reached the bridge the horizon before her had lost all its glory and she saw nothing there but a great mass of black and threatening clouds. Stopping here she peered eagerly toward the village, but in the darkness could discern little save the gray line of the dusty clay road. After a while, however, she heard the sound of voices, and pretty soon saw, indistinctly, the figures of two men coming from the direction of the town. To avoid being seen she stood close behind one of the braces of the bridge. Daylight would have revealed her presence instantly, but in the darkness she was not likely to be observed. The men stopped near the center of the bridge, and Lilian recognized the Colonel's voice, as he said to his companion:

"Mustard, you are always in a panic. There's no danger man. See that you get off at eight. It is about seven now, so you have no time to lose. I'll meet you on the arrival of the evening train of Friday, and play fair with you. Good bye."

The two men separated, the one to retrace his steps, and the other to walk briskly on toward Mrs. More's. The girl could not understand why the person addressed as Mustard should always be in a panic, nor what the danger was to which the Colonel had referred. They had perhaps been discussing business

matters in which they were mutually interested, and possibly the more cautious partner was troubled with apprehensions of loss. But Lilian had not time for much reflection. When the stranger was at a safe distance, she left her place of concealment, and running, overtook the Colonel. He was somewhat startled by her sudden and unexpected appearance, but recovering himself instantly, said in a cheerful tone:

"Hello, darling, did you spring from the ground like a flower? Come, now, this is the heartiest compliment you ever paid me. It shows you were impatient to see me, my dear."

The Colonel put his arms around her and was about to go further in his demonstrations of affection, but struggling, she freed herself, and said hurriedly:

"I've something important to say to you. I know, of course, there's no truth in the story, still you should know of it. Let's go back to the bridge again, it is very dark here in the shadow of the fence and elder brush."

"Of course, of course, my dear, there or here, or any where is the same to me when you are by my side. the bridge is a good trysting place for lovers. I hope our wedding is not to be postponed — that would break my heart; come, now, don't tell me anything half so terrible, my darling."

When they had reached the bridge, Lilian said to him in low and somewhat husky tones:

"Colonel, I was told to-night — "

"That the gentleman you are about to marry is not always temperate — that he has been known to take a little wine at odd times, but my dear, there is something better now before me. I should be bad indeed, if I turned from your sweet lips to even the

choicest wine. Come, now, you must not deny me longer."

She did not. She perhaps hoped to come more easily to the communication she had to make if she were at once to accord him the privileges of an accepted lover. She did not believe the horrid story, and why, therefore, should she hesitate?

"Now, darling," he said, drawing her to him as he leaned against the railing of the bridge, "now that I know you love me still, I can bear the terrible story you have come to tell; but there must be no postponement of the wedding."

"There are two strangers at 'Squire Wharton's —"

"Book agents or lightning rod men?" the Colonel interjected with a laugh.

"No — Jack says they have come to arrest you — so he told me not an hour ago."

The Colonel withdrew his arms from her at once, but she was too eager to tell her story to notice this.

"When they have seized you they will go to Cranberry and take Mr. Winship."

The Colonel was silent for a moment, and then with a voice unnaturally calm, asked:

"What have I done to offend these men — why should they seek to arrest me?"

"Jack says the men claim you are — are — an escaped convict;" she was crying now. "I — I — told him — it could not be so."

"Do they propose to make the arrests to-night?"

"So I understood Jack to say. Of course, they are mistaken — I — I — told Jack they were."

"And so they are, my darling. You are right. You are always right. I shall face them and the world."

"Oh, I was sure you would — I told Jack you would," cried the happy girl. "Now, Colonel, I thought as I came along it would be a grand thing if you were to go right up to 'Squire Wharton's house and let these strangers see that they have been deceived — that you were not the man they are looking for, and then the 'Squire and Jack would know they had been wrong in suspecting you, and then mother would not hear anything of it, and the whole thing would be ended at once, and not talked about. Would not this be a good plan?"

"Splendid — excellent, my dear; why you have the head of a statesman. If I had considered the matter for a full month, I could not have hit upon a better way to settle it, and avoid all scandal."

"Well, let's go at once," she said eagerly. "I will walk with you to 'Squire Wharton's gate. Indeed, if you wish me to I'll go into the house with you. It will be amusing to see these chop-fallen detectives who've been sneaking around our house for days after the wrong man."

"You are right, my darling; you shall accompany me and see the fun."

"And Jack — Jack will know at once I was right — that I knew you better than he did; but in justice to Jack, I should tell you he meant well to you and to me —"

"I am very much obliged to Jack, my darling, he's a growing youth, and will get to be a man if he lives long enough. I predict that Jack will make his mark. I am quite sure his father always does so when he signs a promissory note. I shall remember Jack gratefully, my dear."

"But, Colonel, I fear we are wasting time. Let's go to 'Squire Wharton's as soon as possible. Shall we not start at once?"

"Would it not be well to proceed deliberately, my dear? It is still early; have you the little watch your mother gave you? If so, I'll strike a match and ascertain exactly what time it is — I have the utmost confidence in your watch, and yet I must confess when I am with you it cuts the hours pretty short."

Taking the watch from her pocket Lillian handed it to him. The wind put out the first match lighted, and he said if she would remove the chain from her neck he could stoop sufficiently to get the railing of the bridge between the match and the wind, and meet with better success next time. She did as he requested, and after striking a light he announced to her that it was twenty-five minutes after seven, and added:

"The watch will be safer in my pocket until we get to your mother's house, than in yours, my dear. I'll carry it for you. Oh, we have plenty of time. Half past seven is rather early to make a call; you must learn to adapt yourself to fashionable hours."

Having disposed of the watch and chain, the Colonel drew the girl to him again, but her thoughts were evidently elsewhere. She was eager to have Jack Wharton and his father know, beyond a peradventure, that Colonel Albright was an innocent and honorable man, ready to face any body at any time and in any place. They had been cruelly unjust to think so meanly of him; to entertain for one moment the ugly thought that he was an escaped felon, an outcast without home and family, a fugitive from justice, drifting about the world under an assumed name.

"The Wharton's are not fashionable people, Colonel, and farmers keep early hours. It will take some time to go there. I think it would be well to start at once."

"In a little while, my dear, in a little while; the whole evening is before us. The 'Squire and Jack and the detectives will not mind the delay —"

They were standing near the middle of the bridge. The sound of a footfall was now heard on the eastern end of it. Pushing the girl from him violently the Colonel ran at the top of his speed for a few rods then abandoned the road and disappeared in the shadow of the trees which lined the margin of the river. Lillian, surprised, dumbfounded, crushed, staggered to the railing and clutching it to keep from falling, began to sob and moan as if her heart would break. Finally recognizing Jack Wharton, who had stopped before her, she seized his arm convulsively as if impelled by mortal terror, and the two started homeward.

They had passed the little stretch of valley land, and began to ascend the hill before a word was spoken. The girl was crying bitterly, and Jack could find no words to comfort her. But she stopped him finally and said, between her sobs:

"I have been a fool, Jack — a blind fool —"

"Don't take on, Lilly — say nothing — you will not see the man again. The detectives say he's a smart fellow who got to drinking and went wrong, and stole a heap of money. I hope he'll get away. There will be less said about him if he does. What's happened tonight is our secret — your's and mine."

She made no reply to this, but as they walked on, Jack, encouraged by the night's adventure, became

talkative and gave his companion much valuable advice.

"If anybody speaks to you, Lilly, about the man, say you hardly knew him, and you are not at all obliged to folks for giving you away to strangers, and it would be well for them to attend to their own business and leave you to manage yours."

This statement might not be absolutely true, but there was enough truth in it, Jack thought, to justify its use under the circumstances; at any rate it was his duty to encourage the broken girl and get her into a happier mood, if possible. It is highly probable he would have met with some measure of success in this direction if he had been allowed full time to pursue it; but unfortunately he was not. Three men sprang suddenly from the road side, and while two seized Jack and held him fast, the third put steel bracelets on his wrists, and then fastened them together by a chain behind his back.

Frightened out of her wits by this procedure, Lilian screamed at the top of her voice, and started on a run for her mother's house; but when Jack had been made secure one of the men followed the girl and overtaking her said:

"Don't take on, Lilly. He's a bad rogue; ye oughter be thankful ye air shut of him."

Lilian stopped, for she recognized the voice of 'Squire Jabez Wharton.

"Come, gal," continued the 'Squire, taking her by the hand, "I'll see ye safe home. That man as has been hand-cuffed is not a fit pusson ter be with sich a gal as you. He's wuss nor a lightning rod man, or a book agent, or a sewin' machine ped'ler, an' that's sayin' a heap agin him, but it's all true; he is the mean-

est rascal in the hull country. I know'd he was, Lilly; I know'd he was, gal, when I fust sot eyes onto him."

While 'Squire Jabez was dragging the girl one way, the stiff-legged detective was endeavoring to lead Jack the other; but at this juncture the captive, lifting up his voice, wanted to know what in the name of common sense they meant by all this foolishness; and old Jabez hearing his son's angry protest, faced suddenly about and taking Lilian with him hurried back to ascertain what the trouble was. Overjoyed to find it was Jack and not the Colonel who had been enjoying a private walk with Lilly, the 'Squire now assured the detectives that a mistake had been made, and apologized for putting them on the wrong trail.

The officers of the law were not altogether amiable, and with some little profanity to emphasize their speech, condemned the 'Squire for his stupidity, and proceeded to put leading questions to Lilian as to the present whereabouts of the man known in the neighborhood as Colonel Albright; but the bewildered girl's answers were so broken by sobs that 'Squire Jabez, to whose arm she was clinging, finally grew indignant and said:

"'Tears to my mind, gen'lmen, ye air not puttin' yer questions as delicate like as ye oughter put them to a young gal in the dark," and then shaking his fist, he continued: "I'll be gol-durned, gen'lemen, if I'll stan' by an' let any lauly-bully this gal at this here time 'o night, an' she a widder's darter an' my nearest neighbor. Men of your perfession oughter know enough ter be pertite when ye talk to female wimmen of tender years."

It was impossible, however, for 'Squire Jabez to remain angry on this occasion. He was thinking what

a cunning dog his son Jack was, and how he had fooled the whole neighborhood and likewise his own father, and the more 'Squire Jabez thought of the exceeding cleverness of his son and heir, the more he felt like shouting aloud for joy.

Finding they could get no more information from the girl, the detectives now turned their batteries on Jack; but this young man only knew that Colonel Albright was a distinguished leader of the Greenback party, on intimate terms with the Honorable Andrew Jackson Travis, the poor man's friend, and that he generally fed and lodged at the Cranberry Hotel, a very respectable tavern in the town of Cranberry. It could hardly be expected that one in Jack's humble position would be on confidential terms with all the great statesmen of the country, and know exactly where they were at all hours of the day and night. The truth is, Jack had grown considerably in his own esteem within the last hour, and was so voluble and sarcastic, the 'Squire felt called upon to address to him a few words of admonition.

"Don't be sassy, Jack; keep a civil tongue in yer head, my son. A soft answer turneth away wrath, sez the preacher."

But Jack spoke up indignantly, and said:

"What right have they to pounce down upon me when I'm walking quietly along the road, and put fetters on me, I'd like to know? Confound their ugly pictures! If they'll come at me one at a time, I'll lick 'em both, so I will."

'Squire Jabez could not for the life of him help chuckling with delight at this manifestation of the boy's spirit; but restraining himself as much as possible, he said in rebuking tones:

"Jack, Jack, least said, soonest mended — the gen'lemen meant ye no harm; 'twas a mistake all round."

The truth is, Jack was not half so angry as he pretended to be. He knew the more he blustered, the less attention the detectives would give to Lilian, and just now he was quite sure she would prefer to escape observation. Finding no further information could be gained, the young couple were permitted to proceed on their way, and the detectives started for the town intending to secure Mustard at any rate, and if possible his more showy confederate. They were strong enough to capture either singly, but in case the two were found together it would be necessary to obtain help and act discreetly, for one of the criminals was known to be a desperate character who would make stubborn resistance, and not hesitate to kill to effect escape.

It is unnecessary, however, to trouble the reader further about Ginger and Mustard. They were both on the train which went east from Cranberry at eight o'clock. Their destination was known only to themselves. The suddenness of their departure was the theme of some little speculation among those who knew of it; but as their hotel reckonings were promptly paid by Mr. Travis, and as he was interested in having the two men thought well of, they soon ceased to be referred to otherwise than as persons who had taken part in the Travis-Popper campaign. John Rudd still maintains that Colonel Albright was the most eloquent and convincing speaker he ever heard, and wonders why he has never seen his name mentioned in the newspapers as that of one of the leading statesmen of the day.

XVII

DOUGALD FRAZIER

CHERRY Farm had been three times advertised for sale, and twice put up by the sheriff and not sold for want of bidders. It was Monday now, and on Thursday next it would be offered for the third time. By the last appraisement its value was reduced to seventy-five dollars per acre. The farm could now be sold as an entirety for fifty thousand dollars, and then the live stock and agricultural implements could be disposed of at whatever they might bring, let the sum be much or little. The law threw around personal property no protection against a hard market and unconscionable buyers. Richard Dundren had given up all expectation of having anything left after Peter Sked's claim was satisfied. His only hope now was that enough might be realized from the sale to pay the debt, and thus leave him unburdened for the struggle with poverty upon which he was about to enter. Fifty thousand for the land would leave nearly thirty-four thousand unpaid. It was hardly possible that at a forced sale the season's crop, live stock and farming utensils would bring the latter sum. It would be terrible, if after all were gone, there should still be a claim of ten or fifteen thousand dollars hanging over him to enforce which an execution might issue at any moment. The hard lines which confronted him, however, were the result of his own folly, and he must face them manfully.

If he were but out of debt and assured that his earnings henceforth might be devoted to the use of his wife and children, it would be a great relief. Indeed, it would be almost happiness. If wholly free he did not doubt that he could win a competency for himself and them. He would certainly never again undertake to run a race with ten per cent. This rate might do for a week or month to enable one to bridge over an exigency, just as a drug may answer to correct some derangement of the human system, and yet as a regular diet prove destructive to it. He was resolved to keep out of debt henceforth, live within his means, and pass for what he was, rather than for what he would like to be. It was neither a crime nor a dishonor to be poor, but it might be both to assume to be what he was not, and the punishment for this offense had in his case been almost more than he could bear.

The three months just gone had told heavily on him. He was no longer the alert, brusque, confident man of business. He endeavored to be cheerful when in the presence of his family, but his sunken cheeks, diminished form, and spiritless air, bore evidence to the fact that his nights were no longer passed in refreshing slumber and his days in healthful exercise. The present week, however, would end the harrowing suspense. That the real estate would sell under the last appraisement, there could be no doubt, and as for the personal property, it could be knocked down for a penny, if no more were offered.

Gertrude and Kitty held a secret conference with reference to the condition of affairs on Cherry Farm, and concluded that the younger children of the Dundren family should be relieved of the annoyance in-

separable from a public sale. There were pet horses, colts, cows, calves and sheep to be disposed of to the highest bidder, which the children would grieve to see pass into the hands of strangers, and led away from their old pasture fields to others possibly just as good, but certainly no better. There, for instance, was Uncle Ben, the Leicestershire ram, who was on the most friendly terms with them, and liked nothing better than to have salt dropped from their hands on the grass before him, and while he was smacking his old chops over it, have them take turns in getting on his back and making a horse of him. Indeed, this solemn-visaged old fellow with the wrinkled nose found more pleasure in their company than in that of his own mischievous sons, and Mrs. Kitty, when formally introduced to him could not help laughing outright, and making an elegant double courtesy, so proud and happy she was over the honor of his acquaintance.

Strong friendships grow up between man and beast. Many an old horse whose working days are over is still cared for by a kind hearted master as attentively as if the animal were worth its weight in gold. There was one such gentle creature on Cherry Farm. Old Nance had been on duty for nearly thirty years. She was a famous stepper in her prime, and could rack away at the rate of six miles or more an hour. Every boy and girl in the neighborhood knew her well. It was not a rare sight to see a half dozen children perched at one time on her ample back. She would walk about carefully if it was their wish to take a little ride, or continue to munch her grass if it was their desire simply to sit down on a soft place and rest. How much would they have taken for old Nance at a

voluntary sale? Not all the money in the Cranberry bank! Then there were sleek-haired cows, with great brown eyes, that came up to the milking place twice a day in the season, and sometimes brought with them little red-coated calves which in a few weeks would become playful and run and jump and kick up their heels as if the world were a jolly place to live in.

It would be well for the children not to be present when these pets of the household were sold and taken away, and so on Monday afternoon Gertrude and Kitty took them in charge and were driven by Archie over to the Frazier homestead, where they proposed to spend a few days with Dougald, and, perhaps, during the time run across the fields and see if the presence of a company of sensible folks would not have a salutary influence upon that most emphatic and unreasonable of men, Ben Hood.

Dougald was a white-haired man now, and being inclined to corpulency and somewhat rheumatic, rarely rose to his feet, and never went out of doors without the aid of a heavy cane. He had become so accustomed to this support that he generally held it in his hand while sitting, and, in conversation, always thumped it on the floor to emphasize the strong points of his speech. His friends were therefore never at any loss to know just when Dougald said a good thing, and as his conversation bristled with strong points, they frequently had reason to regret that he did not carry a less formidable and noisy indicator.

They were gathered on the wide porch of the old farm house at sunset, Dougald in the easy chair, Kitty and Gertrude arm in arm walking back and forth before him, while Archie, reclining on a bench, was inhaling the fragrance of an after dinner cigar.

"He's a blamed fool," said Dougald, who was not the most courteous and tractable of men; "he has less political sense to the square inch than any man I know of."

"Ben's not a bad fellow," replied Archie, lazily; "there's a good many worse than Ben Hood."

"You don't know him," responded Dougald, making the floor rattle with a prod of the cane, "you don't know him. I do. Oh, as a neighbor he's well enough, but in politics he's a crank — nothing good enough for him — nothing."

"There cannot be much good said of parties now-a-days," answered Archie. "They are becoming as corrupt as sin."

"Mr. Archibald Frazier," said Kitty, assuming a belligerent attitude, "if you dare to say a word against the Republican party, sir, I — I — shall make a speech!"

"Don't Kitty; we are too feeble to grapple with you in argument this evening."

Gertrude smiled. The fact is, Gertrude was a Democrat, and so was her brother Dougald.

"I fear I have married into a family of rebels," continued Kitty regretfully. "I ought to have come into this country armed."

"You are pretty well armed, my dear."

"Thanks."

"I should not like to have you exchange your arms for any others I know of."

"Mr. Frazier, you are avoiding the issue — that's the way with you Democrats — when cornered you dodge. Logic and eloquence would be thrown away on you — I shall not make a speech."

"You are very merciful, dear. How shall we express our gratitude?"

"Don't mention it.—Sister Gertrude, let's take a little stroll. How still and beautiful everything is. Do you call this Sleepy Hollow?"

"No," replied Gertrude, with a laugh. "Brother Dougald's cane would make the name inappropriate."

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Kitty bowing, as she and Gertrude started. "If not back by midnight, you may conclude we shall not return till morning, and lock the doors."

As the two walked slowly down the road, Kitty said rather abruptly:

"Sister Gertrude, why have you not married? Come, now, explain this little mystery to me."

Gertrude was silent, but not from any feeling of annoyance. The tone in which the inquiry was made indicated a sisterly and sympathetic interest in her welfare.

"Pardon me," Kitty continued, "I have no right to know, and no desire to offend, but the thought occurred to me that you must have had scores of offers, and the thing puzzled me. I will drop the subject."

"No," said Gertrude, softly, "we'll continue it—I have been in doubt; my mind is clearer now. I think there will be a change soon."

"Do you mind telling me the—the—name?"

"Perhaps I had better tell you the situation aim. Last week the proposal was made by Mr. Travis—"

"Mr. Travis!—somebody here—near?"

"Yes; the gentleman recently elected to Congress in this district."

"Oh, Jo! This is splendid—a statesman! I hope he's a Republican."

"You're wrong," replied Gertrude, with a laugh.

"Well, you're sure he's a Congressman, any way."

"Oh, yes — that is to say, he will be when he takes his seat."

"That's the important thing; we shall overlook his politics for the present. I shall convert him when he gets to be my brother-in-law. You accepted him, of course?"

"I did not."

"What!"

"He said he would not take my answer — I should have time to think about it and he would call again in ten days for my decision."

"Have you made up your mind?"

"I think so — I am sure so."

"You will —"

"Marry him."

"Good! I shall spend the winters in Washington with you. Splendid! Sister Gertrude, I'm proud of you, and of your husband-elect. Mrs. Archibald Frazier, of California, marmot velvet, etc., attended the Tuesday reception of Mrs.— what did you say his name was?"

"Travis."

"Yes, dear; but his other name?"

"Andrew Jackson."

"Gertrude, I'd make him change his name."

"Then he couldn't take his seat," replied Gertrude with a little laugh, which had in it a touch of sadness.

"Well, we should, perhaps, not be too particular. It is impossible to have everything just as we want it."

They had by this time reached the road leading from Cranberry to Redd's corners which for two miles southward marked the eastern boundary of Gertrude's

farm. Here was a guide post, and at its base two or three large boulders to keep wagons from running against it while turning from one road into the other. Across the road was Hood's farm, and a little distance to the north the private avenue leading to his house. It was now twilight; the west was still ruddy with the last rays of an October sun. To Kitty, who had all her life been accustomed to the noise of city streets, the silence and the shadows of tree and shrub around her were full of pleasant mystery. She was in no haste to return. They sat down on the boulders at the foot of the finger post, not for rest, but because the stones were so convenient and inviting. Kitty's thoughts and tongue were busy with Gertrude's good fortune, and the splendors of a winter's residence in the Capital. While thus absorbed, an open carriage drew near so suddenly that an effort to retire would have served to attract attention. They therefore ceased to talk, and sat quite still until it had passed by. It was too dark to distinguish the features of the men who occupied the vehicle, but their voices were distinctly heard, and Kitty thought she recognized one of them as that of Mr. Hood. When the carriage had disappeared in the darkness, Kitty, turning to Gertrude found her trembling like a leaf.

"Sister!"

Making no audible answer to Kitty's cry, Gertrude attempted to rise, but falling, sank back on the stone and leaned against the post for support.

"Can I help you, Gertrude — are you not well?" exclaimed Kitty, putting her arms around her, "shall I run to the house for help?"

"I shall be better in a moment — a sudden dizziness."

It was some minutes, however, before Gertrude recovered strength enough to regain her feet, and set out to return. Kitty, putting her arm about her, sought to give her such support as she could. They walked slowly and not a word was uttered by either until they turned from the road to enter the house; then Gertrude leaning for a moment against the fence, said:

"Kitty, never mention what I said about Mr. Travis; it was idle talk. I shall not marry him. I — I — shall never marry."

It was too dark now to see more than a dim outline of Gertrude's face, but there were tears in her voice, and Kitty felt quite sure there were tears also in her eyes. They proceeded together to the porch where Archie and Dougald were still seated. Here Kitty remained, but Gertrude entered the house, and soon after retired to her room.

It was still early in the evening. Dougald's rheumatic condition rendered him somewhat fearful of the night air, and he now went through the open door to the sitting room where a small fire had been lighted for his special benefit. Archie continued on the porch to finish his second cigar since dinner; and Kitty, placing a chair beside him sat down for a little confidential conversation.

"Archie," she said, putting her hand in his, "I want to tell you something — something very important."

"Well, dear, I hope it is nothing that troubles you."

"But it does — it troubles me very much."

"Don't you like your sister Gertrude?"

"Oh, yes — it is not that."

"Your brother Dougald?"

"Fairly well — not so much by a good deal as I do his brother Archie, but well enough."

"I'm all attention."

"It is something you'd never dream of — never. There's no accounting for tastes. It puzzles me. Archie, your sister Gertrude is in love with Mr. Hood."

Archie laughed.

"If it be true, Kitty, what is there in it to trouble you? Ben is, perhaps, the wealthiest farmer in Cranberry county, and big as he is, is every inch a man. I should not object at all to the marriage."

"But there will be no marriage, and this is what surprises me most — he does not love her — she's breaking her heart for him."

"Did Gertrude tell you so?"

"No, no; she has never even mentioned his name to me — that's one of the reasons why I'm sure."

"Kitty, your're away off; let me tell you something. She loves another man, and has for more than ten years. That's the trouble. The thought of wedding Ben Hood has never entered her head."

"Archie, you're away off; let me tell you something. I know all about that other man, and she don't care a straw for him. I wish she did."

"How in the world can it interest you, Kitty?"

Kitty hesitated; she was eager to tell all she knew, but felt bound in honor not to betray the confidence reposed in her by mentioning Mr. Travis' name.

"Well," she replied at last, "I think she'd enjoy that sort of life."

"What sort of life, you bundle of mystery."

"The sort I'm thinking of, you bundle of stupidity — a life where you mingle with famous people and get your dress described in the newspapers, and are referred to as the Honorable Mrs. So and So."

Archie, receiving this communication with a

hearty laugh, said, "I'll take you to Cranberry, to-morrow, Kitty, and have you written up in the Torchlight. It will not cost to exceed a dollar — I think ten cents a line is the regular price for such things; but I didn't think Brett was that kind of a fellow."

"Brett, you simpleton! who mentioned Brett — his name is — well, never mind, but his name is not Brett. What have you to say of Brett? I'm interested in a person of that name."

"This Brett never lived in San Francisco, Kitty — at least he was not born there."

"The one I refer to was not; his mother was born in Cuvier where mine was married. His father lived on the lake near North Allerton. Father has heard nothing of him for nearly twenty years. The name is Robert Brett."

"He's the man Gertrude loves."

Kitty sprang to her feet and confronting her husband exclaimed:

"Archibald Frazier, what do you mean?"

"Sit down, Kitty, and I'll tell you something; don't ask me to tell all, for I was as much to blame in the matter as some others. Gertrude and young Brett were to be married, and without fault of either, the ceremony was interrupted, and the wedding never took place. They were right; those who interfered, were wrong. She has been faithful to him ever since."

"And he?"

"Has not been heard from for ten years. I saw him for a moment three years ago, but had barely time to ask his forgiveness and say good bye. I do not even know where he is, and Gertrude does not."

"I do!" cried Kitty, trembling with excitement,

"Robert Brett is here — is at Mr. Hood's. Come, it is not too late to make a call, let's go at once and see."

"What makes you think he is there, Kitty?"

"Never mind. Trust me for finding out some things. Get your hat and fetch me a shawl. Stir yourself, lazybones! We'll show our neighborliness by calling on neighbor Hood. I rather like him; he seems a frank, hearty, while-souled man, and will be delighted to see us."

"But why such haste, dear? Is it not Gertrude's affair rather than ours?"

"No; it's my affair. I propose to correct the mistake you made."

"Shall we drive over?"

"How far is it?"

"Not to exceed half a mile."

"No; it will be a pleasant walk."

Going into the house Archie obtained his hat and a light shawl for his wife, and they started down the country road together.

"How still it is," said Kitty, "how much room for things, and how bright the stars are. It seems almost as if we were alone in the world. What if we were, Archie?"

"I should be Adam and you Eve; you would be coaxing me to eat the apple, and I should be in danger of eternal condemnation."

Kitty laughing, replied:

"What a nonsensical answer to a wise inquiry. I believe Adam took the apple and when accused put the blame on Eve. Adam was just a boy in years, and it's as natural for boys to climb trees and steal apples as it is for monkeys. We've never heard Eve's side of the story, Archie."

"She did not know enough to write a story."

"She was too good to tell a story; but Adam was not; womanlike she bore the burden silently for the man she loved, bad as he was." Then with a sigh too loud to be genuine, she continued: "And we've been bearing it ever since."

"You seem to have stood up under it pretty well, dear."

"That shows how good the metal is of which we are made. First you take the earthy ore out of the mine, and melting it get man; then you put the product through a refining process which separates the lead, copper and silver from the mass, and obtain fine gold — that's woman."

"That is all clear enough, and very interesting. If we were in a mineral region, I could understand the relevancy of your remarks to the things around us; but we are in an agricultural section, Kitty."

"Where every farm has its orchard and apples, and every house its brass Adams and gold Eves. The connection is easily traced."

"So you think Gertrude has an affinity for the baser metal?"

"We are commanded to do good."

"And to be good."

"Well, this last was more especially intended for men. But Gertrude is either in love with Mr. Hood, or with Robert Brett. At first I thought it must be Mr. Hood, but now I'm sure it's Mr. Brett."

"But why should we travel about the country at night in either case? Would it not be well to allow those most interested to do the traveling?"

"There can't be anybody more interested than I am. In the first place, I like Gertrude, and would

serve her; in the second place, I'm going to like Mr. Brett, and thirdly, I like Mr. Hood, and want to call on him, and besides all this, moreover, and finally, I love my husband, and enjoy a quiet walk with him by starlight."

"The last reason is more than sufficient. How do you know Robert Brett is at Hood's?"

"By instinct."

"Do you know him?"

"No."

"Have you been told a man of that name is there?"

"No."

"Then why do you think he's there?"

"Because."

"That's sufficient. If you were to talk an hour you could not make the fact that he's there or not there clearer to me. We shall doubtless find him at Hood's, or not find him. Nothing like being absolutely sure a man is somewhere in the Western Hemisphere, when you start out at midnight to look for him. I'll bet you a big orange Brett isn't within a thousand miles of Hood's."

"I'll take it."

"I'll bet you two that Hood hasn't heard of him for ten years."

"I don't want so many oranges dear."

"A box of caramels with a picture on the lid of the box."

"I'll take it."

"I wish the orange was gold and the caramels, diamonds."

"So do I, Archie; I like diamonds."

"Oh! but I should get the diamonds, for I shall win."

"Not to-night, dear; you may win some other time when you've had more experience. But not now. We shall find Robert Brett at Mr. Hood's, and I shall know before I return if he's come for Gertrude; I believe he has."

"He's been a long time coming, Kitty."

"There may be a good reason for his delay—if he has been true to her all this time, we shall pardon the delay."

"Did you succeed so well in your own case, Kitty, that you are going to set up as a matchmaker?"

"I had horrid luck. I got a disagreeable and quarrelsome fellow."

"And he—"

"The best of wives."

"Lucky man!"

"He couldn't have done better; he did not deserve to do half so well."

"I think you are right, Kitty; he was unworthy of his good fortune."

"Mr. Archibald Frazier, you are mistaken."

XVIII

UNCLE PETER

WITH much light banter and nonsense Archie and his wife proceeded to the finger post where Kitty and Gertrude had been an hour earlier; then turning to the left went in the direction of Rudd's corners for a short distance, when, leaving the public road they entered the private avenue leading to Hood's residence and a little later knocked at his door for admission.

Hood himself responded to the summons, and in the darkness did not recognize his visitors but observing that one was a woman, he gave them a cordial invitation to enter, and conducting them along the dimly lighted hall, said:

"Come in here — into my office. It's hardly a fit place for a lady, but there's a fire in the grate to take off the chill, and may be more comfortable for her."

They had no sooner come under the full light of the library lamp, than Hood exclaimed:

"Hello, Archie—Mrs. Frazier—my great friends, I'm delighted to see you. Here, Mrs. Frazier, take my grandfather's chair. It was made in 1800, the hair which furnished the cushion was killed in 1802. It's old and easy. Archie, be seated. Shed, Mr. and Mrs. Frazier. Egad, I believe Peter's asleep — never mind the old man, he isn't of much account any way. How are you both, do?"

"Well, very well," replied Archie, with a twinkle

in his eyes indicative of internal pleasure over the disappointment of his wife.

"Don't you find it a little dull in the country, Mrs. Frazier — Sunday like — still and a little tame?"

"Quiet, but not dull, Mr. Hood. I find the country very pleasant, indeed."

"I'm glad to hear you say so; I hope you'll remain. It does one's eyes good to see such women as Gertrude and yourself, occasionally."

"I observe, Mr. Hood, you put Gertrude first," said Kitty, laughing; "that may be just, but — but —"

"Oh, I shall stand up for Gertrude. Nobody can be any better than Gertrude; but why didn't she come with you? It's been a long time since she honored my house by her presence."

"She was not feeling very well this evening, Mr. Hood, and knowing this we slipped off without letting her know."

"Well, I'm glad you came," then lowering his voice, Hood continued: "You see that dirty bundle of gray hairs and rags — that's Peter Sked, a capitalist. You wouldn't take him at first glance to be a capitalist? I picked him up on the road to-night, and brought him in; he would have been sleeping in a fence-corner if I had not."

"Do you call him a capitalist, Mr. Hood?" exclaimed Kitty.

"He's worth not less than half a million. He's on his way to attend the sale at Dundreen's."

"He cannot be the man to whom Dundreen is so indebted?" said Archie.

"The same. He's Mrs. Dundreen's cousin; hard as flint. Money, money, money — he thinks of nothing else."

Kitty regarded the old man with surprise, terror and disgust. She was also sore over her disappointment at not finding Fred. She could only account for Gertrude's sudden illness upon the hypothesis that the carriage which passed them in the early evening contained the man she loved. It was certainly Mr. Hood's carriage, and one of the voices was that of Mr. Hood. Could the other have been the voice of Peter Sked?

"What a horrid old man," said Kitty, with a shiver. "How unhappy he must be with all his wealth."

Sked was reclining in an easy chair, his chin on his breast. His stringless old shoes, naked ankles, and ragged clothing did not present a pleasing picture to the eye. He now began to snore and chatter in his sleep, at times becoming quite emphatic in his utterances. Hood, rising, went over to where he sat, and giving him a vigorous shaking, said:

"Peter — Sked — wake up!"

Springing to his feet and striking out viciously with his right hand, the old man cried:

"Stand back there, damn ye! — an inch nearer, an' I'll brain ye!"

Hood, laughing said:

"Sked — Sked — here's company. Here's Mr. and Mrs. Frazier. You recollect 'Squire Dougald Frazier well? May be you know his son Archie — here are Mr. and Mrs. Frazier."

Sked was now wide awake, and looking with some surprise on Archie and his wife, resumed his chair, and then turning to Hood, said:

"What d'ye say? Eh?"

"I asked if you knew 'Squire Frazier."

"The Scotchman?"

"Yes."

"I knew him. My nephew, Robert Brett, was about to marry the daughter — what's her name? But the brothers made a fuss. I never knew exactly the rights of it; but there was trouble and the marriage never came off."

"Peter, this is Archie, Miss Gertrude's brother, old Dougald's son, and this is his wife," said Hood hurriedly, fearful Sked might say too much in the hearing of Kitty. "I recollect 'Squire Dougald Frazier, very well; no more accomplished gentleman ever set foot in Cranberry County. He was hardly fitted, however, for the life of a pioneer. Until middle age he had been accustomed to the conveniences of city residence, and the luxuries of wealth."

"Proud, overbearing and dictatorial," said Sked.

"Not at all, Peter; not at all; genial, hospitable and courteous. You didn't know him, you old skin-flint."

"As well as I wanted to," retorted Sked, angrily. "He'd order bones thrown to a human creature as if he was a dog. Had born him, he thought a poor travelling man who happened to be hungry, not as good as the hounds he kept."

"Peter, you've had a hundred great lunches at 'Squire Dougald's house, and I venture to say never offered to pay for one."

"Why should I? Eh? The man didn't keep a tavern. He'd a knocked me down, or tried to, if I had offered payment. I don't insult men, Hood."

"Not in that way, Peter," replied Hood, laughing "but in that way. You are the most conscienceless old fraud, Peter, I ever met."

"Who made you a judge of men? Eh? What do

you know about men's consciences? Men are often misunderstood. The Lord was, by wiser men than yourself — by better men — better men, Hood."

Hood laughed heartily at this exhibition of Peter's ingenuity in argument, but suddenly assuming the gravity befitting one who proposed to speak on a serious subject, he said:

"Mrs. Frazier, my friend, Peter Sked, is worth a million —"

"Not the half of it, madam — not anything worth mentioning. I am a poor man, madam."

"I believe you, sir," responded Kitty, disdainfully, "you look like one. I pity you from the bottom of my heart; you are not only poor, sir, but, pardon me, you are unclean. I have some little knowledge of you, and you have some little claim on me for help. If Mr. Hood will be kind enough to have you taken to a bath tub and thoroughly cleansed, it will afford me pleasure to present you with a suit of decent clothing."

Kitty was angry; why she should be, and what special claim Sked could have upon her, neither Hood nor her husband could imagine; but she was evidently in earnest, and her proposition to give Peter a bath, happened to be in exact accord with Hood's humor. Stepping to his desk, he rang a little bell, and a moment later a negro responded to the summons.

"Give Mr. Sked a bath."

"Yaas, sah."

"I shall not trouble you," said Sked, rising. "Where's my hat and umbrella?" Then with an angry flash of the eyes he turned to Kitty and continued, "Pride, madam, sometimes goes before a fall. Ha! If not good enough and clean enough to breathe the same air with you, I shall bid you good night, madam."

"Give Mr. Sked a bath — strip him and dump him in," said Hood, emphatically, to Cæsar.

"Where's my hat and umbrella? Eh?" Sked demanded angrily. "I'm old enough to attend to my own affairs —"

"You will find them in the morning. You shall not leave this house to-night. Cæsar, give Mr. Sked a bath!"

"Yaas, sah."

"And Cæsar," said Kitty, "I'll send you a suit of clothes for Mr. Sked. See that he puts them on."

"Yaas, Mistis."

"Damn ye! do you think I can't take care of myself? Is this a scheme to rob me?" asked Sked savagely.

"No, no, Peter, it's a scheme to scrub you," responded Hood.

The old man was trembling with rage, and as the servant approached struck at him, but the ebony giant picked him up and carried him out of the room as if he were a disobedient child.

"He should have a guardian," said Kitty warmly.

"He seems now to be blessed with two," responded Archie, dubiously.

"Mrs. Frazier," said Hood with a laugh, "I don't know, of course, what interest you may have in Peter, but I do know a bath will do him good."

"Mr. Hood, have you some one about the house who will run over to Mr. Frazier's for me?"

"A dozen."

While a horse was being saddled, Kitty prepared a little note and in a few minutes the messenger started with it. A half mile may be covered by a fresh horse

it, less than three minutes, allowing ten minutes for delay at Frazier's, and three minutes to return, and we have the time consumed in doing Kitty's errand.

"The clothes are for the old man," said Kitty to Hood; "I have borrowed a suit from Archie."

"This is the most outrageous interference with the private rights of a citizen I ever knew of," said Archie. "You have stripped Sked and robbed me. Now, my wife has gone mad, don't follow her example. One crazy person's enough at one time."

Hood carried the bundle to the bath room, and handing it to Cæsar, gave him such instructions as he deemed necessary.

Fifteen minutes later, when Peter was returned to the library by Cæsar, he was in appearance a new man. The white shirt collar and handsome necktie set off a fairly good face to great advantage. The dark Prince Albert coat, with vest and pantaloons to match, though not a perfect fit, hung not more loosely than was becoming to a gentleman of his age. Above the ornamented slippers which encased his feet, could be seen purple stockings of the utmost fineness. There was now a dignity and manliness in the old man's bearing wholly unobserved before.

When he entered the room Kitty advanced to meet him.

"Uncle Peter Sked," said she, with a courteous inclination of the head, "permit me to introduce myself. I am your niece, Mrs. Katharine Frazier, the daughter of Mr. John Ross, of San Francisco. You are looking quite well, uncle."

"You are a saucy hussy, madam."

The old man's arms hung straight from the shoulders, and he did not lift them to meet Kitty's extended

hand; but undismayed by this, she turned and bowing gracefully to her husband, said:

"Mr. Frazier, my uncle, Peter Sked."

"How do you do, sir," said Archie rising; "I'm pleased to make your acquaintance," and then with a wink to Hood, which did not escape Kitty's notice, he continued: "I now understand, sir, from whom my wife inherits her great beauty. It's from your side of the house, sir. She's the very picture of your sir."

Ben Hood coming up now, took Peter by the arm, and said:

"You're looking remarkably well, my friend, be seated — here, take my grandfather's chair; you are the guest we honor to-night."

"Are you my niece? Eh?" said Sked to Kitty, who had placed herself beside him. "Are you John Rose' daughter?"

"I am, uncle Peter."

"You're made a mistake to-night, madam; you've lost —"

"Oh, I've made many mistakes, uncle. If I had known my uncle Peter was a rich man I should have been more careful;" then looking soberly to Mr. Hood, she continued: "I certainly should have married better; but being poor and with no great expectations, I had to do the best I could, and that was not very good."

There was a broad smile on Ben Hood's face as he returned the wink Archie had given him a few minutes ago.

"I shall not leave you a penny, madam, if I had a million — not a penny."

"If you did I should spend it, uncle, and that would grieve you, and make my husband worse than he is. But, uncle Peter, in all seriousness, is there not

something in the world to live for besides money? Come, now; think and tell me. I'm your sister's child, would you have me pinch and starve, and live in rags to save up a little money for other folks to spend? Suppose you had your life to live over again — suppose you had an only daughter, would you advise her to such a course? I think better of you, uncle, than to believe you would."

The old man's lips were twitching nervously, but he did not speak.

"You had a daughter, I should be glad to know my cousin. Surely you do not keep her in rags and wretchedness, when you are so able to render her comfortable and happy?"

There were tears in Peter's eyes, but he continued silent.

"Think how happy you might be, what cheerful days and delightful evenings you might spend with her and her children — your own flesh and blood, uncle — grandsons, may be — another phase of your own life, and a continuation of it. Where is my cousin — your daughter?"

"Dead," sobbed the old man.

It was Peter, not Sked, who spoke. Kitty placed her hands on her uncle's bony wrists, and there were tears in her eyes and voice when she said:

"I pity you from the bottom of my heart — you are even poorer than I thought — a homeless wanderer, but not friendless, uncle. You were my mother's playmate, and I shall be your friend, whether you want me to be or not. — Mr. Hood tells me you are rich. Don't imagine I want a dollar of your money; I do not. I have all I need. For my sake, for your own sake and the credit of the family, you must henceforth dress and

live like a gentleman. If you think you cannot afford to do this at your own cost, it shall be at mine. I have enough for both."

The old man's long bony fingers had closed about Kitty's hand and held it tightly.

"And uncle, if I have said a word to offend you, I ask your forgiveness. If I have been rude it was because I was angry — because I could not bear to see you in — in rags — you, who should be as well clad, proud and happy as other men."

While Kitty was endeavoring to reconcile Peter to the occurrences of the evening, footsteps were heard in the hall, and looking up she saw a large, handsome well dressed man of perhaps thirty-two, standing on the threshhold of the library door. He was evidently surprised to find strangers in the room and in doubt as to whether he should enter, but Hood observing him, called out:

"Come in, Rob. You know Archie. Mrs. Frazier, Mr. Brett."

Giving his hand to Mrs. Frazier and then to Archie, Robert said:

"I have been taking a run over your old farm, Mr. Frazier." Then observing Peter, he continued, "Why, uncle — really, I didn't recognize you at first — you have changed very much, and for the better within the last hour."

Peter looked up to indicate he had heard his nephew, but made no reply.

"Did you call at the house?" asked Archie.

"No, no, I didn't venture to do that. Mr. Hood informed me your brother Dougald was living there, and I am not at all sure he would be pleased to see me."

"You need entertain no fear of that girl. Dougald is wiser than he was."

"Mr. Brett," said Kitty, "did you ever hear of one John Ross?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. He married my mother's sister — Uncle Peter Sked's sister, but as I understand, removed many years ago from Cuyler to California."

"I am his daughter — your cousin —"

Ben Hood, bringing his single hand down with a tremendous slap on Archie's shoulder, cried:

"The incidents of the night are almost like a romance. I believe if I were in Rob's place, I'd cap the climax by kissing my cousin."

Under the inspiration of Ben Hood's eloquence the cousins clasped hands again — and — then did just what Ben Hood would have done if he had been in Robert's place.

"Did you come to-day?" asked Archie.

"I reached Cranberry at four. Mr. Hood met me at the train, and we arrived here a little after sunset."

There was a quick flash from Kitty's eyes to those of her husband, which in effect said:

"I told you so. Never doubt me again. Men need not hope to know as much as women."

And the answering flash said:

"You've won the oranges, and likewise the caramels, with the handsome picture on the lid of the box."

"Cousin Robert," said Kitty, rising, "I hope to meet you to-morrow. Uncle Peter, you must be ready to take a drive with me in the morning. I shall be here for you bright and early. Good night all."

"Don't be in a hurry," said Hood. "Peter, when you want to go to bed, ring the bell and tell them to show you to a room. Rob, let's go with Mr. and Mrs.

Frazier for company and exercise. Come, Archie, we'll lead the way, and give the cousins an opportunity to talk over family matters. I doubt not they have many inquiries to make about their kinfolks."

With Hood and Archie in advance the party proceeded leisurely to Dougald Frazier's. What passed between Kitty and her cousin was uttered in a low tone and the strictest confidence, and neither Ben Hood nor Archie had any inkling of what it was, nor any care, perhaps, to know; but this is certain, when Ben Hood and Robert said good night at the gate, and turned to retrace their steps, Kitty ran into the house, and going directly to Gertrude's room, knocked loudly at the door.

"Is that you, Kitty?"

"It is. Let me in, please."

"Not to-night, dear."

"Gertrude, you must! I shall break down the door. I can't stand it."

"Well, come."

Gertrude had not retired. She had been struggling with the past, and perhaps concluded her lines had not fallen in pleasant places. She had been thinking, also, of the future, and the prospect did not seem at all bright.

"I know your secret, my lady," said Kitty, embracing her; "I know the very man you love."

"Kitty, you're crazy."

Kitty laughed and continued:

"I can tell you something more — the man loves you."

"Why do you break into my room to talk nonsense?"

"I'm so full of it."

"You seem to be overflowing with it, dear. I am not in love with any lady."

"You are — you are; I have the proof."

"What I said about Mr. Travis is nothing, Kitty. I do not care at all for him."

"Oh, I know that. But how about Robert — Brett?"

"Kitty, Kitty, why do you trifle with me?" cried Gertrude with flushing face. "Has Archie told you something —"

"Not much — but Robert has!"

"Tell me what you mean."

"I mean, dear, that Robert is faithful and impatient. He is here; I have seen him."

There was no further trifling on Kitty's part, and had been none on Gertrude's; both were in tears, but it was a summer shower with its bow of promise and its sack of gold. Gertrude's heart, at least, was full of sunshine.

The next morning Robert called on Gertrude. We shall not venture into the little parlor where the interview took place; nor shall we accompany them in the afternoon on that happy ride to Dundren's; nor shall we tell in detail how Mr. Travis found that, like the manuscript of a poor novel, he was destitute with thanks; nor shall time be wasted on the particulars of a negotiation between Robert Brett and Mr. Dundren, which terminated in a loan of money on long time and low interest to pay off Skeed's claim. The reader must be content with a brief summary of the occurrences of the next few weeks. Archie and Kitty made elaborate preparation for their sister's wedding, and when the day arrived, the Frazier homestead was decked with evergreens, flowers, and rich autumn leaves.

Dougald gave the bride away, and Ben Hood was the groom's best man. Old Peter Sked was present in elegant attire, with a handsome wedding favor pinned to the lapel of his coat. He was growing very proud of his niece and nephew, and had so far yielded to their wishes as to dress well at their expense. To-day he was especially pleased when Kitty put her hand on his arm and introduced him to the wedding guests as her uncle Peter Sked.

After a splendid dinner Robert and Gertrude, Archie and Kitty were escorted to Ben Hood's carriage, and when nicely seated went flying over the road to Cherry Farm, followed by a long train of merry young neighbors, male and female. At Dundreen's there was to be a great gathering of the beauty and chivalry of the county. The Cranberry band had been engaged to make music for the dancers and the promenaders. Mr. Travis did not attend, but it was his own fault, for an invitation had been sent to him. Jack Wharton was present, but the awkward fellow seemed at a loss to know just what to do with himself. Lilian, however, was perfectly at ease, and as fresh and lively as a meadow.

Toward ten o'clock the bride and groom took leave of their friends, and accompanied by Archie and his wife, hastened to catch the night train for the East. It is said Ben Hood's bay team won high credit for speed on this occasion. The trunks of the party having been sent forward in the afternoon, were on the platform, checked and ready to be put aboard. There were but a few brief minutes to wait; the headlight of the approaching train could be seen, then the roar of its wheels was heard, and then a hearty good bye was

said to Ben Hood, and the two newly married couples started to meet the sun in its rising.

* * *

Along towards Christmas time there were great doings at widow More's cottage on the hill, when Jack and Lilian stood up to be made man and wife. If the latter thought at all of Colonel Albright, and felt sore at heart over the ending of her first dream of love, she did not show it in the least; in fact, she doted on Jack all the more because she knew by actual experience he was more manly and better otherwise than some men who were far more showy and pretentious. And if Jack thought any the less of her for her girlish love of the Prince, he did not make it known by act or word, or hint. It may be safely assumed, therefore, that he found solid satisfaction in the thought that he had been in some degree instrumental in rescuing her from a life of misery.

If there was a perfectly contented and happy farmer in all Cranberry County, 'Squire Jabez Wharton was the man, and no mistake. What a sly dog Jack was, any how! When he seemed to be no where in the race he was found coming in ahead of every body, and carrying off the prize. To tell the truth, though, may be those tell it who ought not to, Jack was a chip of the old block, and had inherited the subtle wit for which the Whartons had always been distinguished.

If any one desires to hear of the shabby tricks and beguiling methods of that Hebrew Jew, from Jerusalem, 'Squire Jabez will stop the plow in seeding time to tell the story. It is an instructive tale and fully as interesting the fortieth time you hear it as the first.

The gentle reader is advised, if he likes good stories, to call at the Wharton homestead. To go there you start from the Cranberry hotel, proceed northward about two hundred yards, then turning squarely to the right, follow the road past the church and across the river, and then on until you ascend the hill crowned by Mrs. More's cottage. This is a good place to stop, for Mrs. Jack Wharton has excellent cider in the cellar, and good, crisp doughnuts in the cupboard; but if impatient for an intellectual feast you should keep on until you reach a garden on the left, enclosed by a high, rough picket fence to keep the chickens and turkeys from the peas and newly planted sweet corn of early spring. Just beyond this garden patch behind two walnut trees, is the Wharton domicile, an unpainted, wooden structure, with an ample porch, the roof of which is covered with oak hand-made shingles, much warped by the rain and sunshine of half a century, and a little moss, green, withal, in spots.

If it be summer time and soon after the hour of noon, 'Squire Jabez will probably be sitting on the porch in the arm chair having the sheepskin cushion, smoking a corn-cob pipe. He may, however, if it be a little late, have dropped off into a refreshing nap, and in this case it would be well on entering at the gate, to exercise some little degree of caution, and be wary, for recently the 'Squire has bought an able-bodied brindle dog to entertain visitors in his absence. The instinct of this guardian of the household, being somewhat defective for lack of special training, has led him within the last ninety days to mutilate three innocent and useful persons on the supposition that they were either book agents, sewing machine peddlers, or lightning rod men. Of course, the dog will improve

by long association with 'Squire Jabez, and come in time to discriminate between men, and only quench his thirst for blood in a legitimate and proper way; but at this writing it would be well to keep an eye on him.